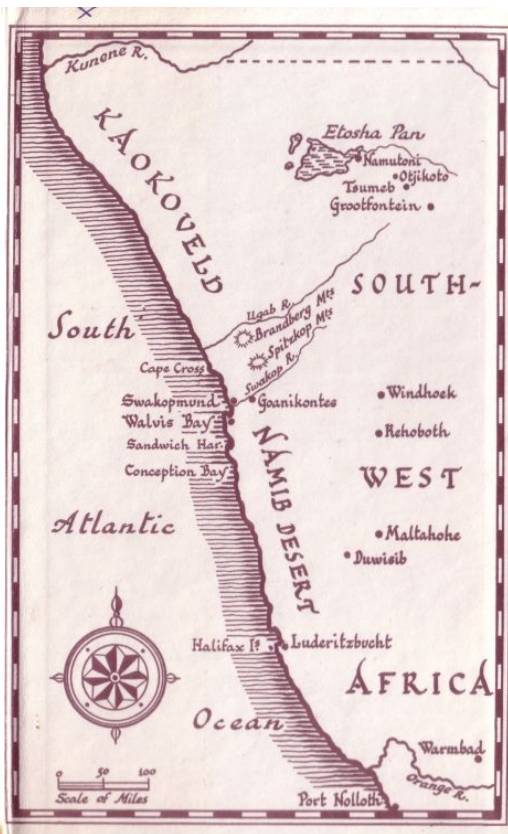
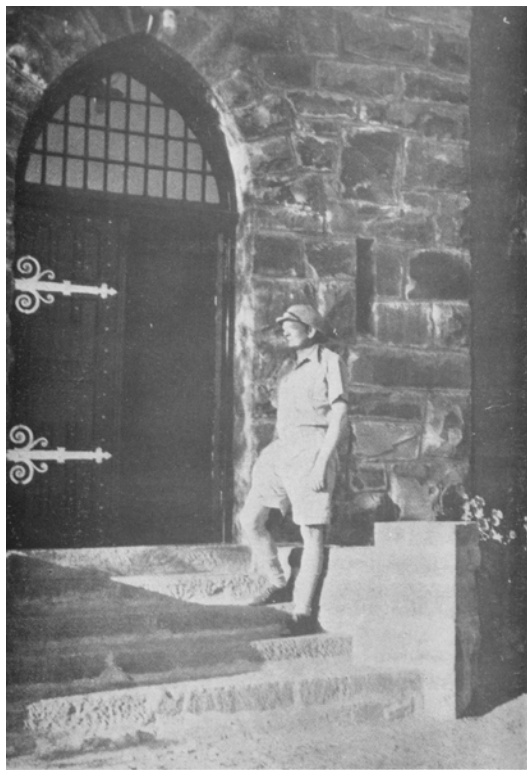


SO FEW ARE FREE



Lawrence G. Green





The author at Schloss Duwisib, the castle where he wrote "Africa's Strangest Tale".

BOOK ONE : NORTH TO THE RIVER

CHAPTER 1

TAVERN OF THE SEAS

Daar kom die Alabama
Ver, ver oor die see
Daar kom die Alabama
Ver, ver, ver oor die see.

As I wander on the slopes of Table Mountain the guitar music and the words of the folk song drift up to me like threads of silver in the hot gold of evening.

It is one of those evenings when the light has a magic quality, when distant landmarks stand out sharply and in full colour. In this sunset I can trace the pattern of my life, the seatracks I have followed along these shores, the trails going deep into my own country. Now I can take a thousand miles and more in my stride. All the lands under the Union flag are stretched out below me. Up here, alone with my memories, I am free to roam the frontiers I have known.

I can see the sun glinting on the glass of the lighthouse tower on Robben Island. The same long rays are shining into the windows of my seaside cottage at Blaauwberg. On the white beaches of Dassen the penguins will be waddling towards their burrows, while myriads of duikers are strung out low over the waters in swift, homing flight. Across the Berg River bar, where I once ventured in small yachts, a fishing boat is hurrying before darkness hides the guiding marks.

Shadows are falling now over the coast road that carried me so often into the north. All the grain fields of the Swartland are a yellow blaze. The western side of the Olifants River valley is deep in shadow; but on the far bank the orange trees are brilliant green and gold, and high above them Great Krakadouw glows in the sunset. One searching ray penetrates a bushman cave, lighting the hunting scene on the wall.

Namaqualand watches the sunset thankfully. Wagons have outspanned beside the sandy tracks and meat is grilling over white-hot firewood. The heat has been merciless; all are waiting for the night. On a beach north of the Olifants a diamond

scintillates until the sea that has thrown it up covers it with a strand of seaweed. The westering sun flashes on salt pans, tints the glare with pink. At the mission up in the Kamiesberg they are holding evensong in the wilderness. Somewhere in a sandchoked valley north of Springbok there is a great flat boulder with a mat hut perched upon it; and there, too, the sun will be throwing a long shadow. Snakes venture out of their holes on to the cooler earth, and scorpions creep from beneath their stones.

The baboons are not missing this moment. They bark at the setting sun - a custom which, in the country, is regarded by the coloured people as a religious observance. "*Daar gaan ou bobbejaan nou kerktoe*" they say. The impartial sun rests on the barbed wire and the machineguns guarding the diamond wealth of Alexander Bay, and on gaunt and incredibly ragged Hottentots beside the Orange River with their goats. Flamingos and wild ducks are making for their nests. Soon the chattering of the monkeys will cease in the river jungle.

In the dune country north of the river a Bushman crouches over his fire and his meal of springbok ribs. He is one of the last of his race, but still he lives beyond the law, in the vast freedom that survives where civilisation has not yet begun. The sun is a red ball on the horizon now. It gleams on the brandy bottle flung away by a group of prospectors; these men who live precariously raise their glasses and drink to better fortune tomorrow. Ships half buried in the sand dunes catch the red glow ... a stranded steamer here, a rotting wooden vessel there, where she has lain for a century. Close inshore, but cheating the desert that engulfs ships, a coaster steams northwards, with her brasswork glittering. Just for a second an old, burnished silver coin takes the light. It was under the sand yesterday, and tomorrow the "soo-oop-wa" wind will hide it again; but now it is uncovered, and no man is there to follow the clue. Inland, a hundred miles from the sea, the stone ramparts of a fantastic castle are merging into the surrounding hills. There, surely, I must take you on this long trek into the lonely places, for I

know of nothing in Africa to match the spell of that distant stronghold.

From oasis and remote store, mining camp, fishing station and desert harbour, the sun is departing. Countless zebra and wildebeest raise their heads beside the great Etosha Pan. Perhaps the "lost city" I once sought in the Kalahari is in the shadows now; I only know that we found not a trace of it.

Here in the sunset are the seas, the beaches and the roads I have travelled. Empty lands, you may say, but I find some queer longing satisfied in those solitudes. In the cities so few are free. Out there in the sunset are men who have learnt different ways of life, men shaped not by the crowd but by their own philosophies. Will you travel this long road with me?

It begins in the past of the old seaport which was once the "Tavern of the Seas". This is our base. These sunlit streets which have seen so many adventurers depart will hold us for a while before we too, see Table Mountain fading over the horizon. So look round first,

however familiar the scene may be. Something gracious lingers here, a background of stirring events, an atmosphere which the new cities do not possess. Some of the people, some of the houses, and always the mountains contribute a flavour to the life of Cape Town. And on the waterfront you are in touch with the whole seafaring world.

The docks have changed their clothes, as it were, and you have to walk much further to find Table Bay. Yet nothing can obliterate the tang of the sea, and seamen do not change at all. Heave a sigh for the bygone days of sail - and lo! a fulligged ship will soon appear in all her grandeur. There are still landmarks that have not been lost in dockland. Cape Town takes in the sea as a man takes in his breath. Down there at the edge of the bay you can put the clock back as far as you like.

*Daar kom die Alabama
Die Alabama oor die see
Kerlinkie swaai, lekker draai
Daar onder om die draai.*

Somewhere in the pines there must be a Malay picnic party. This has been their song for more than eighty years, and perhaps there are still a few - there cannot be many - who watched the threemasted Alabama break out the Southern colours as she entered Table Bay with the Northern barque Sea Bride as her prize. All Cape Town was on the mountainside that day, for there were rumours that a naval battle was to be fought outside the three mile limit. Somewhere the U.S.S. Vanderbilt was lurking, trying to round up the Alabama.

Cape Town's sympathies were with the South, and Captain Semmes of the Alabama was loaded with flowers and fruit every day of his stay - sent by the admiring ladies of the Cape.

I know a whitebearded man who still wears proudly the cufflinks presented to his father, a great sailmaker, by Captain Semmes for services to the Alabama.

Off the Cape the Alabama captured fourteen Northern prizes. No ship ever made a deeper impression on Cape Town. In a side street there

is still an Alabama Hotel. And there is the undying song :

*Daar kom die Alabama
Ver, ver oor die see.*

The Malay Quarter is in the shadows now, but tomorrow the sun will break warmly over the flat roofed houses with their high stoeps, and from the minaret the priest will call the Faithful to prayer. Then you will hear the cobbled streets resounding to the clatter of the wooden sandals called kamparangs. The sun touches the white aced houses and the Malay Quarter is alive, Eastern in atmosphere as the bazaars of Malacca and Samarang, six thousand miles away.

Well might a stranger be mystified by this Eastern colony in Cape Town. The Malay people are different from all the other coloured folk of this city of mixed races. Some intermarriage with converts to Islam there has been; but the pure Malay type has never been absorbed by those with darker skins. Wellshaped, clear-cut features and black, oblique eyes, delicate hands and small

feet, rounded foreheads; by these signs you may distinguish the Malays. The women have fine teeth in spite of their fondness for sweets. They wear the gold earrings prettily in their oiled, straight black hair. Some cling to the yashmak - all women who follow the teachings of Mahomet strictly should go veiled - but there are many who have abandoned the custom. The men can appear extremely well-dressed on occasion; while a Malay woman at a wedding or feast delights the eye with her gorgeous robes.

The presence of a Malay colony of 30,000 souls at the southern tip of Africa forms a story as strange as any; a romantic story that goes back to the days when the tall ships of the Dutch East India Company sailed into Table Bay for refreshment. It is commonly thought that the Malays were brought to the Cape as slaves to carry out skilled work for which the Hottentots were useless. Many undoubtedly were slaves; but it is not generally known that a number of free Malays made the Cape their home in the early period of the settlement.

From the first the Malays showed ability far superior to the natives from Madagascar and West African negroes who came by the shipload as slaves. The Cape was the convict station of the East; but the Malays were mainly political prisoners rather than criminals, and, there were men of royal blood among them. They are still the aristocrats of the Cape Coloured people. The islands of Conrad's novels, Java, Sumatra, Celebes and the Moluccas, supplied a stream of emigrants to the Cape for many years.

It was the fatal Malay characteristic of "running amok" which made the Dutch doubt the wisdom of allowing the colony to grow too large. The Malay, it seems, does not care to commit suicide in the usual manner. When he imagines that society has wronged him, when debts have made him desperate, he turns to a suicidal custom which is regarded among his own people as an honourable method of escaping from difficulties. He grasps his kris handle (sometimes the blade is poisoned), draws the weapon and stabs the nearest person to the heart. Then he dashes into the street, kris in hand, amid

shouts of "amok! amok!" He runs straight on, never turning, stabbing everyone, men, women and children, in his path. Spears, knives, guns are brought out against him, and finally he dies in all the excitement of battle. The terrible custom persists, though in a milder form, among the Cape Town Malays to this day. Centuries ago, before the hot blood of the tropics had cooled in these Eastern exiles, it became such a menace that the Council of the Dutch East India Company issued a "Placaat" forbidding the importation of Malay slaves into the Cape.

Nevertheless, the Malays soon earned the respect of their masters in every trade they entered. Some of Cape Town's first restaurants were started by Malays, and you can still see cafes where the food has a decidedly Oriental flavour, where "kabobs" of mutton are served with rice and where queer sweets, gaily coloured, are displayed in the windows. Malay coachmen won renown as safe and expert drivers. For years the Rogge Bay fishery was ruled by them, and the Malay fishhawker with his conical hat and two baskets slung across his

shoulders on a bamboo yoke was a familiar sight in Cape Town up to the middle of the last century.

One of the mysteries which they brought from the East Indies with them is the "Khalifa", or Malay sword ordeal. I have sat at midnight in a Malay house on the Signal Hill slopes listening to the drums thudding, the rhythm of the tambourines, and watching the players slashing their arms with swords in time with the music. A man with sharp skewers thrust through his ears, throat, shoulders and cheeks walked among the audience. Men stabbed themselves with daggers in religious ecstasy, while incense filled the room and gave protection against the razor edges of the weapons. Yet there was hardly a drop of blood to be seen through the display. Long practice and sleight-of-hand may play a part in this strange ceremony, but there is something more mysterious, something which has not yet been explained, in the stoicism of the performers.

Cape Town sends more pilgrims to Mecca than any other Muslim community of the same

size in the world. A wharf in Table Bay Docks, when the pilgrims arrive or depart, becomes a brilliant rival to Baghdad; a parade of coloured silk and headdresses worn by massed thousands of well-wishers struggling to kiss the cheeks of the pilgrims and send them away with the double handclasp of Islam. When the pilgrim ship moves out there is heard a single moan from the multitude, a sound such as is heard in no other crowd. Then a priest on shore chants, and the Faithful answer: "Allaho Akbar !"

A Malay wedding, when no expense is spared, is one of the most gorgeous sights of Cape Town. Parents no longer arrange these matters, marrying their daughters to men they have never seen. The Malay girl makes her own choice. She is not present at the simple ceremony in the mosque; but you may see her driving through the streets in an open carriage afterwards wearing the golden "medora" headdress of the bride.

The songs of the Malays, those peculiar to the Cape Malays that is to say, are called "gommaliédjies". Some are songs that were

known in Holland centuries ago; forgotten there, they are kept alive by Malays whose ancestors heard Dutch sailors singing them at the "Tavern of the Seas". Guitars and drums beat out the rhythm of these old tunes from the Netherlands and the East Indies. Generation after generation of Malays passed the songs down by word of mouth. Thus in the music of the Malays does the spacious spirit of Old Cape Town survive.

I am bowling over the Dockroad cobblestones in a hansomcab with a fezzed Malay driver urging his horse to reach the top speed of seven miles an hour. There was a row of hansoms at the foot of Adderleystreet. I might have taken the "Balmoral Castle" cab, the "Happy Go Lucky" or "Spes Bona"; but deliberately I have selected the "Alabama".

It will be a sad day for Cape Town when the last of these Victorian ghosts goes to the scrapheap. They have been here for nearly a century; they have become part of the atmosphere of the town, and without them the waterfront would not look the same. The hansoms have carried open-handed humanity

just a little of the way to diamond rushes, gold rushes and all the wars of our time. This is their last refuge. Long may they cling to it.

Old drivers like talking of the great days before motorcars. The best cabstand in Cape Town during the South African War, I gather, was outside the Mount Nelson Hotel. Other hotels in the Gardens, packed with wealthy officers of crack regiments, had their long lines of hansomcabs. Then there was the "Irish Stand" outside Parliament at the top of Adderley Street; where quick-witted Irish drivers waited for the legislators; and the "Malay Stand", which still exists, near the railway station.

A bearded ancient, shabby, wearing a wide-brimmed hat, emerged from the Cape Town railway station some years ago and seated himself in a hansomcab with his scanty baggage.

"Drive me to the Queen's Hotel," he boomed. The passenger was Alfred Aloysius Smith, who had just become famous as "Trader Horn", African adventurer and author. The cabdriver, however, could not image this strange old man staying at the fashionable Queen's Hotel, so he

drove him to a much less pretentious hotel of the same name in Dock Road. "Trader Horn" was a wealthy man at that time; he had received royalties from his bestseller and was bound for England. Nevertheless he showed no surprise when the hansom pulled up in the Dock Road. He remained at the hotel for three weeks, and on leaving remarked: "Some first-class hotels are disappointing, but this one really is a first-class hotel."

The hansoms recall a more leisurely Cape Town. The sightseeing run to Hout Bay was a favourite cab drive, and the drivers, hired by the hour, made their own pace. A visitor who did not mind being conspicuous might profitably explore Cape Town in a hansomcab today. One old driver told me that his most generous passengers between the wars were elderly people who arrived in the great cruising liners and hailed the old-fashioned hansoms with delight. One gave him a pound; another told him to wait on the quay while he collected shirts, boots and a suit of clothes for the driver. Sentiment clings to the hansoms - the aged hansoms that bring back

memories of the gay 'nineties in London. One English visitor to Cape Town, indeed, recorded the fact that he always chose a hansom because he liked to imagine that his father had ridden to the theatre in London years before in the same cab.

Many of Cape Town's hansoms were built in London. You can tell a London hansom by the luggage rails and higher roofs. The cabs built in Cape Town have sloping roofs, forcing the driver on occasion to travel uncomfortably with a box or suitcase balanced on his knees.

Seamen are now the best and almost the last customers of the hansoms. The Dock road which has seen the stately journeys of famous men in hansomcabs now watches midnight chariotraces - hansoms crowded with seafarers, and, sometimes, like a grimy postillion, a pleasantly jingled stoker astride the horse. The hansomcab has had a long run, and in this last refuge it is nearing the end of the journey. Cape Town will miss these weather-beaten relics with their heavy loads of memories.

The cabby has been paid, and here is the waterfront - all the clamour and the brightness and the baffling marine odours of the wharves. For some reason I am thinking of the oldest ship I ever saw berthed here in the corner where so many cutters and ketches and fishing schooners have been moored.

She was called the Purveyor, and a naval officer with a taste for historical research discovered that she was built in the very early years of last century. Here, beyond doubt, was one of the "oak walls" of Old England, still in service (when I knew her) at the "Tavern of the Seas" after more than a century of hard work. She was not more than forty feet in length; but her oak timbers and planking, blackened with age, were immensely heavy. I never saw such bluff bows outside a picture. They had pushed up much salt water in their time. It is known that the Purveyor was used as a supply ship to Nelson's fleet; some say that she was within sound of the guns at Trafalgar. Her first port of registry could still be read in quaint, carved letters under her battered counter - Falmouth.

Who knows how many tropical ports and islands she made, how many storms the little oak cutter weathered? Navies changed from oak to steel, but the Purveyor sailed on. When the teredo worm threatened her hull, when her decks leaked beyond repair and the fast motor cutters took her cargoes, she was left to decay.

A year or two passed in idleness, the first long holiday in her busy life. Then, in 1922, a whaling company bought her for a coaling hulk - his ship which deserved a Viking funeral. I was on the wharf the day before they towed her away. They were stripping her of the few solid, ancient fittings which might still have a value; and finally they rigged tackle and hove the thick, ancient mast out of her bilge. There was not a coin, not a sentimental fragment under the heel to throw light on the life of the doomed old lady of the sea.

The Purveyor escaped the fate planned for her. On the way to the whaling station at Saldanha Bay she broke away from the towing steamer and drifted on to the rockbound coast. Thus died the Purveyor, with all her memories of

pigtailed sailors, wide oceans, and the thunder of muzzleloading guns.

I can see a line of fullrigged ships all along the West Quay. One is painted white, with her name in gold under the stern, and her home port - Honolulu. It seems a long and romantic passage. Another is French, with a smart little bearded master in white uniform, green plants under the saloon skylight, and an enormous dish of fragrant fried potatoes in the galley. (Such are a schoolboy's impressions). She is the Ernest Reyer, and I find a young South African has signed on for the passage back to France. He has never been to sea before, but men are scarce and he has left his home at Somerset West to sail in her.

Months later a lifebuoy bearing the name Ernest Reyer drifts on to a beach in France. That is all that is ever heard of her.

One of the queerest of all the tales I heard at the docks was told by a stowaway. There was a ship with a deck cargo of railway coaches, and as I watched her unloading this man fell into conversation with me. He had just landed

undetected, and for some reason he trusted me not to give him away. He had crept into a comfortable passenger coach before the ship left England, taking food with him. On the rare occasions when seamen entered the coach at sea he had hidden under the seat like any other ticketdodger. At night he slipped out to fill his waterbottles and steal food from the galley. He had slept on cushions and fare much better than those unfortunates who hide in coalbunkers. I think he deserved his free passage for his ingenuity.

I never tire of watching the boatbuilders at work. While my own small yacht is taking shape I am there every day. I see her as a mere jarrah stem and false keel and oak transom. Then the steamed oak timbers grow out of her like the ribs of a skeleton. The planking is hammered on to the frame and riveted with hundreds of copper fastenings. When you buy a yacht you also buy the sea; as much of it as you can use is yours for the asking.

"It's not the boat so much, but the man who sails her," said "Daddy" Scott, who built my

boat. He was a small, thin man with a grey moustache and steelrimmed spectacles; with a footrule in his waistcoat pocket and a piece of chalk ready in his hand to illustrate any point in ship construction. "Give me a bottle of Cape brandy, and I'll lay down a battleship," declared "Daddy" Scott.

"Daddy" Scott was not only a boatbuilder - he had sailed on many oceans. His favourite yarn was startling enough. It concerned a steamer called the Young Dick, sailing out of Sydney along the Great Barrier Reef. Her master was either so lazy or so reckless that he did not bother to find the tricky openings in the reef; he would choose a likely place, wait for a swell to lift the ship, and then go full ahead over the coral. One day the Young Dick was posted as missing, and everyone knew what had happened to her. "Daddy" Scott had many tales of the Pacific. He was once carpenter in a schooner on the New Guinea coast, bartering tobacco for birds of paradise. But he knew the coast north of Table Bay, too, and we had been as far as Luderitz in a little sealing cutter. "We rode out a

gale off the islands with a sea anchor - one hand on deck and the crowd down below playing cribbage. The boat counts for a lot, but it's the man who handles her ! Why, I remember a fellow sailing a ship's lifeboat from Table Bay to Luderitz just for the fun of it. There's only one thing to guard against - a heavy following sea breaking on deck. And it happens so seldom that you had better not worry about it."

Russian Smith is seen no more on the waterfront. He was a weird character with his long beard, his cudgel and his dog. For years he lived in a cabin under one of the old wooden jetties. Anyone else who tried it would be arrested as a vagrant; but Russian Smith, harmless and crazy, went free.

There was a story that Russian Smith had been bewitched by a Hottentot woman at Port Nolloth. He was always chasing his soul, so he said, and dodging imaginary bullets. He declared that the sharks came at night and looked up at him through the planks in his cabin, just above the water. Some said he had been an officer in one of the Czar's crack regiments. He could

speaking five languages. But I think he was just an old shellback who had become mental. "I'm on patrol," he would say if you asked him where he was going.

Dockland is kind to strange characters, and Russian Smith received his food from countless ships' cooks. It went on for years - until war came in 1939 and he was turned out of the docks at last. He never survived that period of exile from the waterfront where he had wandered mysteriously for so long. Russian Smith died before the war ended.

Now I have in mind as sane a man as any I have met. His face and hands are the colour of mahogany, and through the scanty white hair his head is becoming the same deep shade of brown. He has light blue eyes, undimmed by the years, always kindly. At eighty he speaks and moves slowly, but I do not think he has a rheumatic joint in his body.

He belongs to the waterfront, though in his young days, he tells me, he roamed the Transvaal as a prospector. He was in the Barberton gold rush; many a night he stood among the miners in

the "Lone Star" saloon and heard the barmaid putting herself up to auction at closing time.

He invested all his savings in a fishing boat. She was built to his own sound design and he called her Barracouta. The venture failed. So in an old age that seemed everlasting he started again, as skipper of a rich man's yacht and caretaker of the seaside estate when the owner was away. It was a comfortable post for the old man, and it lasted for several years. Then one day I found him living in a backroom and cooking his own food over a paraffin stove.

"Got too old for the job," he told me with one of his rare smiles. "But I'm not worrying. I've never been on my beam ends in my life, and something will turn up."

His wealth was in his unassailable philosophy. That old man had achieved freedom from fear. "Everyone is put on this earth to fulfil some purpose," he used to say. "We talk about luck ... there is no such thing as luck. I have been on this earth before and I shall be here again. Money is nothing."

He found a job in charge of a small survey vessel laid up in Table Bay Docks. There he had his serene life. He had a warm bunk, with his watch, his pocket barometer and his toothbrush hanging from nails driven into the bulkhead. In his bookshelf I saw a copy of the "Occult Review". Five years after he had been dismissed for being too old he was still there, puffing his pipe and making superb coffee. A long time after that I heard that he had died while prospecting for gold in the Knysna district. The wheel had turned full circle for the ancient mariner.

Coasters seem to live longer than the great, deepwater ships. Some, that I knew as a small boy carried the scars of half a century of service; they were still afloat up to a few years ago. They seemed to attract a special type of seaman - men with vivid and sometimes chequered careers.

One little ship, the Clara, was commanded for many years by a skipper with a walrus moustache, Axel Johansen. He had started as cook and risen to the bridge, a most unusual achievement. Then there was the famous little Harrier owned by her master, Captain Ted

Wearin. A genuine lover of the sea, Wearin was first a yachtsman. He decided to make the sea his profession, gained a certificate and entered the coasting trade. For years he hunted seals, carried labourers and stores to the guano isles and became known in every port along the Cape west coast.

I found odd characters in another coaster, the ill-fated Pemba, in which I travelled from Port Nolloth to Cape Town twenty years ago. The Pemba looked top-heavy for open sea work; and indeed I discovered later that she had been built for the Amazon trade. After a long period on that placid river she was now loading copper ingots off Port Nolloth, and preparing to dip her tired bows into the steep seas beyond the bar.

She was delayed owing to trouble in the engineroom. Everything on board the Pemba seemed to be defective; if you opened a door the handle came away in your hand, and even the lifeboats appeared to be decaying. My face must have revealed my thoughts, for a little man with a harelip and a badgeless cap with torn peak came up to me with a gloomy prediction. He was

the mate. "We shall be lucky," he said, "if the fast and commodious steamer Pemba ever makes Table Bay. A rotten dog basket - that's what she is, and one of these days she'll turn over and drown the lot of us."

They dared not allow the Pemba's propeller to race, for the vibration would have torn the aged engine from its bed. So the copper ingots had been stowed aft, with the result that the bows crashed down on every sea and caused the whole ship to shudder. I began to think the mate was right.

It was obvious that the mate had come down in the world, but only after his death did I learn that he had been educated at one of England's leading public schools, and had commanded fine ships during the 1914-18 War. Torpedoed twice, the war had played havoc with him.

The second mate wore a dungaree coat which he turned inside out at mealtimes to hide the paint stains. He was a large man with reddish-grey hair. He made no secret, of his weaknesses. "My father was a naval officer who left me his thirst and nothing to quench it with," he

announced while I was keeping him company on the bridge. "I've run guns into Port Arthur, and I've been sacked from forty-two shipping companies. This will be the forty-third - if ever we make Table Bay." He was a most outspoken man, and he told me with pride that before he had signed on for the voyage in the Pemba the marine superintendent had asked him if he drank. "Of course I drink - but women's my chief failing," replied the second promptly.

To my surprise and relief, the Pemba reached Table Bay. About a year later, however, the mate's prophecy came true. She foundered in a gale off the Natal coast. All hands but one made the coast in the boats.

That was the only coaster I ever felt any doubts about. I would have gone round the world in most of the others. My favourite nowadays is the Griqua, a former cheese and butter ship, built in Rotterdam in 1900. On an October morning in 1945 I boarded her for the run north to Walvis Bay. And there on the Griqua's deck was the same Swedish captain who had taken me to Walvis twenty-three years before.

He had a cat and kittens in a box in his cabin, and he brought out a bottle of whisky. There was not a port between Mombasa and the Congo that he did not know. Though he had been carrying explosives on a dangerous run during the war, the man had not changed at all. He said, as he had remarked twenty-three years before, that I must be a little queer to spend a holiday at sea when I might have been driving a car through the countryside. I defended the sea, and secretly he must have agreed with me. The ship carried no wireless. A great hush rested over us when the Griqua cleared the land. Life became more simple and more satisfactory. The gentle swinging of her was a lullaby. Each man of the crew had his duties, but their faces were not those you see in a city bus at eight thirty in the morning. I realised again, as I always do at sea, why doctors send many of their patients away on voyages.

The Griqua's chief steward was a man of sixty-six who had been a regular army caterer. Few men go to sea late in life, but the chief steward had done it for his health, he had put on

weight and the calm routine suited him. He went on board his first ship, he told me, wearing a long, waxed moustache. The captain made him cut off the ends - it was too military. I never met a more resourceful chief steward. He had no refrigerator but his menus were more tempting than the elaborate dishes served in larger ships.

They say it is a hard life at sea, but I knew a marine engineer who stuck it out, and liked it, until he was seventy-three. Once he was in a coaster which ran aground on a coral reef off the East African coast and remained there for sixty-four days until she was towed off. The chief told me that at low water you could walk all round her. Every day he gathered coral and rare shells. One day a native paddled across to the reef in a canoe to catch octopuses for food. A large octopus caught the native and pulled him into a pool. The chief engineer reached the spot in time, started a tug-of-war with the octopus and dragged the native away. By the time the ship had been refloated the chief had made a valuable collection of shells which the museum in Durban accepted gratefully.

I admire the ways in which these men of the sea meet emergencies, defeat boredom and prolong their active careers far beyond the point where the landsman takes to an armchair and slippers. They have their days and nights of struggle, but their lives are without most of the little irritations of the shore.

On the waterfront I meet men who declare they will never live on shore again. One has a wife and three of the nicest children you could find on land or sea. He is Knud Andersen, master mariner and novelist; and he has brought his sixtyfoot ketch Monsunen all the way from Denmark to Table Bay.

"I was in prison for sixteen years - working in a Copenhagen shipping office," Andersen tells me. "I had to mortgage my house to buy this ship. Now I have hardly a penny left; but I make no secret of it, and I find wonderful kindness everywhere. The Atlantic is my home now. I have broken away from the cities and I'll never go back."

Andersen has three good men on deck, a cook and a steward below. They receive no regular

pay. In Rio de Janeiro a newspaper paid Andersen forty milreis for an article. He divided the money among his crew and told them to go for a run on shore. That evening he found the money on the cabin table. His men love the ship and the Andersen family.

Mrs. Andersen is fair, like all the Danes, and she wears a sailor blouse and a handkerchief round her head. The eldest child of the deep is Lis, and at this time she is twelve; she has a slate and a battered typewriter, and the sailors are always watching her write. Jan is a shellback of seven. "One of the best men at the wheel when we're running before a gale," declares his father. Finally, there is four-year-old Ture, with his sea-blue eyes, an ocean baby who remembers more of the sea than of the land. When I take him on shore he is so used to the violent swing of the ketch that he can hardly walk on city pavements. I can still see him beating time to the music in a crowded cafe.

Knud Andersen and his family make friends wherever they go. The islanders of Tristan da Cunha offered to build them a cottage if they

cared to settle there - a rare tribute when you know that the island is already overpopulated. But the Andersens are always gazing towards the horizon. Now it is Table Bay. They are bound for the West Indies and New York. Not many in the whole world are so free as the Andersens.

Gaze upon an old hag of the ocean called Diolinda. It is September, 1936, and six men have sailed the schooner into Table Bay from Liverpool after one of the hardest passages in the records of the sea. It has taken them 126 days, and they have been through almost every vicissitude it is possible for human beings to endure. They called for buckets of water to drink as soon as they were alongside the wharf.

Frankly I am more interested in the skipper, Captain Thomas Voss, than in the tale he is telling me. He has encountered gale after gale. The old steel schooner was on her beamends when the cargo of cement shifted. The mainmast was sprung, canvas carried away, rivets started. They drifted for so long in the equatorial calms that the salt meat and beans ran low. So did the fresh water. They had to catch sharks, dolphins

and flyingfish. Then there were more gales, the standard compass went out of order and navigation became a problem. Captain Voss "ran down his latitude" and sighted Table Mountain at last. He had covered twelve thousand miles without sighting land.

"If a judge was to tell me I had to do six months in gaol I should look upon it as a holiday after what we've passed through in the last four months," remarks Voss. I can believe him now, for he told me something of his life story and he is really a man in search of peace. He has a good humoured face with a grey stubble of beard and a thoughtful, kindly smile; I think he was a plump man when the Diolinda left Liverpool.

Voss is one of many who do not care to talk of their experiences in the 1914-18 War. Shattered mentally, like the poor old mate of the Pemba, he looked round the world for a peaceful corner where he could forget. He looked for more than that. He wanted an earthly paradise and, strange to say, he found it.

He found it in the group of ninety lazy tropical islands in the Indian Ocean called the

Seychelles. The island trade, guano and copra, gave him a living. For years he sailed between the outlying islands and Mahe, the capital. Sometimes he went further a field with his schooner Elizabeth, and in March 1927 he was at Tamatave, on the east coast of Madagascar, when the great cyclone whirled down on the anchorage. Fifty small sailing craft were lost that day, and the Elizabeth was carried two miles inland by a tidal wave. The trees brushed her keel.

Voss secured another ship, the barquentine Elizabetha. For eight years he loaded coconuts and other cargoes at the outlying islands and carried them to Mahe, the centre of the paradise. He was as free and as happy a man, he said, as you would find on any ocean. Then he anchored off Agalega Island, one of the most remote outposts of paradise. Agalega has a coconut oil factory and a sideline in horsebreeding, the horses being fed on the coconut residue called poonac.

It is difficult to find an anchorage off Agalega, for the deep water runs up to a reef that

rises steeply. Voss had more than 150 fathoms of cable out, but his anchor dragged and he drifted on to the reef. That was the end of the Elizabetha. Voss and his crew spent six months on lonely Agalega before they were picked up and taken back to Mahe. The Seychelles newspaper, after dealing with the wreck, remarked: "Captain Voss is a man who has always made it his practice to apply the good old principle 'Nil, nisi bonum' to both the quick and the dead. That is why he has not an enemy in all the world."

Voss lived on shore for a time. Between the wars, it seems, one could have five servants and feed all of them for £1 a month. The islanders eat turtle meat almost every day of their lives. Bread fruit and manioc cost next to nothing. There is no starvation in paradise. But Voss was an active man. He raised the price of a new ship, went to England and bought the Diolinda. I do not know where Voss is sailing now, but I like to think he is still loading rich cargoes at Praslin, where the coco de mer grows; at Frigate Island, where they cultivate vanilla; at the fishing and guano

stations of the Amirantes; at Marie Louise and Coetivy and all those other dream isles in coral seas where Voss found paradise.

It was ambitious, that search of his, and many another man would have found only disillusionment. I think Voss must have taken with him something that many other seekers after paradise have never possessed.

*Daar kom die Alabama
Ver, ver oor die see.*

The Alabama has departed but the endless drama of the waterfront goes on. Tomorrow will see the end of 1945, but now in the dusk a tug is moving slowly into Table Bay with a sixmasted schooner in tow. She is the Cidade do Porto, flying the Portuguese flag; and she has been picked up south of Agulhas with her sails lost in a cyclone, deckhouses smashed, leaking and with her pumps out of action. She is forty-one years old, a lady with a disreputable past. Once she belonged to an American gambling syndicate, and lay at anchor off the Californian coast -

outside the threemile limit. She was raided by gangsters, and they say that the money from the roulette tables is still safely hidden on board. I shall go on board the battered Cidade tomorrow, but not in search of dollars.

This is only the end of an evening. Tomorrow the pines and silver trees will tremble in the dawn wind. Under the sun the sea will be a shining pathway, the waterfront gay with the colours of the flags and the funnels. Somewhere beyond the mountain ranges men and women will make coffee beside their wagons. North of the Orange River the dune world, not yet stark and menacing, will take on soft tints in the reincarnation. I know a rose garden hidden in the deep, sunbleached gorge of a dry river; it will be beautiful when day breaks tomorrow. Far up the coast, the sleek bodies of thousands of seals will gleam as the sun comes over the headland at Cape Cross. The doors of memory are ajar, and from Table Bay to the distant frontiers the sea and the land are alive with the people and the scenes of my restless years.

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CHAPTER 2

THE TREASURE HUNTERS

All day I have been peering down into the calm green jade of Table Bay. I am on board a famous salvage ship, fascinated by the thought of recovering sunken treasure.

The ship is the Arpione, sister to the Artiglio which brought up the Egypt's gold. Her master is Bruno, the man who worked for three years on that £1,000,000 enterprise. Lenci the diver is here, too. I have been eating ravioli and drinking Chianti with the treasure hunters. They have shown me the weird steel chambers in which they explore depths of the ocean far beyond the range of ordinary diving dress. Lenci tells me it is impossible to pump fresh air down to these Frankenstein monsters. He sits there in a steel tomb wearing a gas mask to purify the scant supply of air. Has the man no imagination? "Never yet have we failed to bring up a treasure once we have fixed the position of the sunken ship," Lenci tells me. "But this job ... no one knows where to look."

They are trying to find a cargo of tin ingots on the floor of Table Bay, lost there more than a century and a half ago. Years ago, it seems, someone found one ingot, stamped "Banka" - produce of the old Banka tin mines in the Dutch East Indies. So in 1937 these Italians have come here with the Arpione to raise the whole lot.

The Arpione is equipped with a huge grab, an ingenious affair with steel prongs. Again and again the fourton grab plunges down to the sea-floor; the winch tune changes; the great claws, deep in the mud, shut mercilessly like a greedy, clutching hand. Nothing can escape them down there in the ooze.

The winch rattles, and expectantly I watch the grab release its giant's handful of mud on deck. Hoses play hopefully on the black mass. Sometimes there are crumpled masses of copper sheathing. Fragments of blackened oak come up; two old cannon see daylight again; bits of pottery, then more timber. Always there are prawns. Never is there a glimpse of tin, much less of gold. And the treasure syndicate is paying

the owners of the Arpione £50 a day for the services of the ship.

It cannot go on. At any moment the voracious grab may lift the first instalment of a fortune. But delicate calculations have to be made. It is heart-breaking. The grab descends for the last time, disgorges its mud, and the Table Bay treasures still remain undisturbed. I take a final glass of Chianti with the philosophic Captain Bruno and I realise that there is no royal road to wealth. Unless, of course, you know where to look.

It is not hard to find old wrecks in Table Bay. The sandy floor is littered with them from the white beach at Blaauwberg to the Camps Bay rocks. I have a list, gathered from the Cape archives, of more than three hundred lost ships. The bones of Portuguese caravels lie there under the tall seagrass; East Indiamen, Dutch and English, with their stern tiers and cannon; a pirate brigantine here, an honest trading ship there; galleons, schooners, and steamers of all the seafaring nations; an ill-fated company, the like of which you could find nowhere but in the old "Tavern of the Seas".

Treasure? I have seen romantic scraps and relics brought in by dredgers, by diving boats, and by a lighter specially equipped for salvage work long before the Arpione arrived. Coins still bearing the crowned lion of Holland and the monogram of the Dutch East India Company. Golden ducats, guilders and rixdollars, and those seaworn silver pieces called ducatoons, very like pieces of eight. And the cargoes! It is almost incredible how well the sea preserves certain articles of merchandise. The bed of Table Bay seems to be paved with Chinese porcelain. Many fragments have been recovered, some of them more than two centuries old. Rolls of silk have been brought up after many years, and the inner portions found to be in beautiful condition. Peppercorns retain their flavour after long periods in salt water. Rosewood from the Orient has been salvaged and proved perfect. And ships' bells, of course, have only to be cleaned and rung to recall the whole dramatic scene of pig-tailed sailors relieving the watch in the flickering light of stern lanterns.

Step on board the Table Bay dredgers and see the collections of inspiring oddments they gather in the course of the day's work. The great mud-eating dredgers, harbour craft though they are, steam round the South African coast under their own power; and their masters are bluewater sailors, who treasure any little relic of the adventurous past they may find. Such a man is Captain H. S. Hodges (Conor O'Brien's mate in the famous ketch Saoirse during the first leg of the world cruise), later in command of the bucket dredger Sir Thomas Price. I learned much about dredgers from him.

It was during the removal of a million tons of sand and mud, part of the Table Bay Docks extension scheme, that so many strange finds were made. Hardly a day passed without some old fashioned anchor, some part of a sailing-ship's skeleton, coming to the surface. Anchors, with their imperishable greenheart stocks and broken flukes, tell their own story; you can picture the doomed vessel dragging her cable before the gale. Deadeyes, copper sheathing, wire stays, belayingpins, fathoms of barnacled

chain, blackened oak timbers - Davy Jones yields up these things readily enough. The crockery on board the dredgers bears the names of a whole forgotten fleet. The leaden platter, covered with shells, must have been old indeed. Sailors hacked salt junk on such plates when Jan van Riebeeck was Governor of the Cape.

Old cannon and cannonballs have been hauled up by the score. Shapeless masses of barnacles are sometimes found to contain German Mauser rifles, with corroded barrels, relics of the Boer War. Often the trigger mechanism remains perfect when the stock has been eaten away. Brass candlesnuffers and quaint old bottles decorate one dredger's messroom. Bottles of beer, estimated to be fifty years old, were once found, tasted, and finally consumed with satisfaction by all hands. But there is really very little from an elephant's tusk to a typewriter, that has not been scooped up from the Table Bay mud.

"Have you seen a yellow tobacco bag full of diamonds?" a man once asked the master of a Table Bay dredger. The master shook his head.

He had seen many queer things come up in the buckets - but no diamonds.

Then the man who had questioned him so eagerly told his story. He had brought the diamonds with him from South-West Africa, and all the way down the coast he had worried about that tobacco bag hidden in his suitcase. Would the police be waiting for him? Would the Customs men find them?

As the steamer entered Table Bay Docks the white helmets worn by two policemen on the quay caught his nervous eye. "They are after me," he thought; and then he dropped the yellow tobacco bag through the porthole. But they were not waiting to arrest him. The customs officials hardly glanced at his baggage. And the yellow tobacco bag is probably still lying in the mud at the bottom of Table Bay Docks.

Among the valuable finds, of course, have been many stray coins. Handsome George IV silver coins, almost in mint condition, were given back by the dripping hand of the sea not long ago. It is when a dredger's pumps are being cleaned that these most fascinating little

treasures come to light. A spadeguinea of George III, suddenly revealed, made one crew wonder whether a ship's moneychest lay beneath them. A blue and white vase, with the colour brilliant, was shown to an expert, who declared it was two hundred years old. There are also many tons of Nankin "trade" porcelain on the floor of Table Bay, mingled with hundreds of tons of coal.

Coins by the handful have been recovered by divers. In 1881 a Cape Town jeweller named John Courtenay employed an experienced harbour diver, Jan Steyn, to explore two famous wrecks. They were the Haarlem and De Jonge Thomas, Dutch East India Company ships, driven ashore near the Salt River mouth in north-west gales late in the eighteenth century.

A primitive "submarine eye", in the shape of a hosepipe with a glass end, was used to survey the ground. Dark shapes were located and buoyed, and Jan Steyn went to work. First of all came up china cups and saucers, and then a real success - a thousand silver rixdollars !

There is little doubt that many more valuable articles and historic relics would have been taken

from these two Company ships; but a gale washed away the buoy, and Jan Steyn never found his wrecks again. They must have been covered over with sand as the huge seas broke into the bay from the north-west. This, indeed, is a common occurrence - the covering and uncovering of old Table Bay wrecks. I have seen on the beach at Milnerton a vessel fully ninety feet long, or rather the keel and ribs and some of her teak planking. Old residents had no idea that the vessel had been lying beneath the sandy beach for all those years. The scouring of great winter gales had exposed her.

Ships' bells, fine prizes for lovers of the sea, have been picked up by Table Bay divers. In 1887, for example, the bell of the Arniston, lost in 1792, was brought to the surface. And a diver in 1884 found a bell bearing the name 'John Vtber, 1690.' There was something of a boom in salvage work during the eighties of last century. The divers quarrelled bitterly, however, and sometimes fought below the water. In the end the Government withdrew all treasure seeking concessions.

You may wonder why so many ships with rich cargoes should have been lost in Table Bay. The fact is that until 1860, when an army of convicts started the construction of the present breakwater, the bay was almost an open roadstead. A sailing ship could cut and run for it to open sea during the summer months, but in winter the long curve of white beach became a lee shore. Then the master of a vessel which dragged her anchor would run up the distress signal; and agents on shore sometimes offered £1,000 to the boat's crew who would take out a sheet anchor. There were wrecks every month in the winter.

On many a night the bell was rung at the Castle to call out the Company's servants for rescue work. On the beach stood the gallows, the penalty for looting stranded cargoes. Sometimes, as on that disastrous 17th of June, 1722, every vessel at anchor in the bay would be lost; there were ten wrecks that day and six hundred and sixty lives lost. The beaches were littered with spices, pearl and tortoiseshell, sugar and saltpetre, to the tune of £250,000. Eighteen years

later there was consternation among high Dutch officials when the ship *Visch* was observed drifting into the breakers. Outwardbound for the Indies, she had on board twenty chests of gold and silver coin, to the value of half a million sterling - pay for the Company's servants. "I'll give two months' salary to every man who goes out to save the money," shouted Governor Tulbagh in desperation. They saved the lot.

Yet there are still moneychests awaiting recovery. I know one man, Mr. A. M. Carrol, who has tried again and again to reach some of these well known hoards. From 1903 to 1908 he employed cutters and divers, and succeeded in locating the bones of several treasureships. One of these ships was *Het Huis te Crayenstein*, a stately, highpooped vessel, which ran on the rocks at Oudekraal beyond Camps Bay, "at the third glass of the dogwatch." in foggy weather in 1698. Brass guns, bearing the Company's coat of arms, and bars of white metal have been brought up from the sand which has almost covered the wreck, thus establishing her identity. Papers in the archives prove beyond doubt that there are

chests of money down there under the sand as well.

Near the same spot, almost a hundred years later, the Portuguese slaveship San Jose struck and foundered, with five hundred wretched slaves under hatches. The fortunate among these had their chains struck off in time, but two hundred perished. That was on 5th November 1799, when a bloodred sun rose and gave warning of the terror to come. Captain Valentine Edwards of the Sceptre struck his topmasts, but the gale burst with a roar, the cable parted, and the ship soon grounded on a reef. During the day many were swept overboard. That night the whole poop was torn off, and scores of men saw a chance of escape. They swam to the floating wreckage and clambered over it desperately. Close to the shore a great wave capsized the poop, drowning all who clung to it. Only forty-two reached the shore safely - there were four hundred and eleven officers, seamen, and marines on board when the cable parted. The Sceptre was identified by Mr. Carrol during his search in 1903; his divers sent up a sheave

bearing the government broadarrow and several of the copper vessels called powdermonkeys.

The greatest Table Bay gale of all raged almost within living memory - on the night of 17th May, 1865. Eighteen ocean-going ships and thirty smaller vessels became total losses on this night, some with all hands. The breakwater was still under construction, too small to prevent the confusion which soon arose in the crowded anchorage. The sailingships were easy victims; people on the shore saw them drift into the surf one by one, some of them breaking up almost immediately under the hammerblows of the storm. Three mailsteamers, the Briton, the Dane, and the Athens, held out the longest, for they were able to steam at full speed and thus relieve some of the strain on their anchor chains. Steam out and away from danger they could not - a modern liner would be in danger if her master attempted to drive her into such seas and squalls as those which lashed Table Bay that night.

The Athens, in a gallant but ill-fated attempt to reach open water, struck close to the Mouille Point lighthouse. Hundreds on shore, heedless of

the stinging rain, saw her lights die and heard the last cries of her doomed company. The dread noises she made, grinding on the rocks, were very plain. Spars, hatches, cabin doors floated on shore, and the watchers dragged them eagerly out of the breakers in the hope of finding survivors. But not one soul was saved. In the morning only a boiler and a cylinder head showed above the furious surf. They are still there, rusty tombstones of the sea. The Briton and the Dane were saved only by the gale moderating. The Dane, indeed, was in shallow water, almost within the line of the surf, when the wind dropped.

Bonfires flamed along Woodstock Beach in the darkness to guide survivors drifting on rafts to the shore. This was all the help that it was possible for the people of Cape Town to give. Enormous seas broke all along the beach, making it impossible for any lifeboat to be launched.

It was a sinister dawn, heralded by the howling wind and lash of rainsqualls, that broke over Woodstock beach next morning. As far as

the eye could see ships were pounding and grinding in the surf, with the green breakers making a clean breach over them. On board some of the wrecks, desperate men clung to the rigging. Many ships had lost masts and spars. Hatches, timber and cordage were coming up in tangled masses on to the beach every minute.

The deathroll was not so large as might have been expected - between fifty and sixty lives were lost, in comparison with the heavy toll of hundreds during previous gales. But the loss of shipping was considered enormous in those days of cheap ships. The value of the wrecked ships was estimated at £120,000, while their cargoes must have been worth much more. Cape Town newspapers of the day came out with pages of advertisements offering the hulks for sale. It was as though the Spanish armada had met its doom on the shores of Table Bay.

I have seen photographs, early efforts, but clear enough of the beaches of Table Bay after that gale. They are like pictures of the legend of the Sargasso Sea come true; ships and great pieces of ships heaped one upon the other,

mounds of spars and cargoes, dead men, dead ships. Small wonder that there are still safes and valuables, gold and silver, diamonds and sapphires, in the sands of Table Bay.

Truly, men will take great risks when there is bullion on board a lost ship. I can easily imagine the eager crowd on the beach at Mouille Point late one September night in 1899. The weather was fine; but a short while before a steamer's siren had been heard, and distress rockets had raced across the sky. On the rocks, with her clusters of lights still burning, lay the Thermopylae. A fine passengership this, with clipper bow - and doomed. Bound from Australia to England, she had cut one of Table Bay's corners a little too close. The reefs had gripped her.

A boat with the women and children left the wreck first; then others, until all hands had abandoned her. The Thermopylae was bumping heavily now in a rising sea, and showing signs of foundering. Reluctantly the captain had left £100,000 in sovereigns in the charthouse; twenty boxes, each weighing seventy-five pounds,

consigned to a South African bank. But the Thermopylae was breaking up; cases of butter, rabbits, frozen meat, were drifting on shore, to be seized by the excited crowd.

Meanwhile, tugs from the docks had hurried to the scene. The captain reported his cargo of specie. A boatload of volunteers went to the wreck for it. Hard work it was; but the money might still be lying there on that dangerous reef if the effort had not been made. The last box was lowered feverishly over the side and the boat pushed off with her precious load. Ten minutes later it would have been impossible; the seas broke clear across the decks of the Thermopylae.

On deck, in horseboxes, were two racehorses, one of them valued at £2,500. The owner had given them up for lost. In the morning they were found wandering on Green Point Common. One of the first seas to break over the Thermopylae must have smashed their boxes open, mercifully allowing them to swim ashore.

Divers examining pipelines still bring up portholes and other relics of the Thermopylae. They must wish that some of those boxes of

bullion had been left behind. Nevertheless, as I have indicated, there is treasure enough on the floor of the "Tavern of the Seas" - a tempting legacy left by men who found the searoad to India and many of those who followed on that path of old adventure. I doubt whether there is another bay in the world which has seen more shipwrecks and sudden death.

There are still a few stark, rusty iron fragments of lost ships jutting above the waters of Table Bay to remind the summer crowds of old disasters. One broken hull, once the steamer City of Lincoln, rests so close to the shore that you could wade out to her.

She was lying in Table Bay in August, 1902, with both her anchors out and all her cable, while the engineers worked feverishly to repair a breakdown: A gale from the north-west brought heavy rainsqualls, and in the night the City of Lincoln dragged her anchors and drove broadside on to the breakers on Woodstock Beach. All hands reached the shore safely.

The America, a steamer which caught fire in 1900 and was scuttled in shallow water, still

shows her clipper bows above the water off the beach. Divers brought up hundreds of bottles of beer and stout from her holds. For years she made a useful mark during yacht races. Sea birds found a sanctuary on her fo'c'stle head. Swimmers rest on her old iron deck. Other wrecks were visible, but in 1909 the authorities blew them up to clear the bay for the historical pageant held shortly afterwards.

Protected by the Breakwater and the new harbour, the remnant of Woodstock beach will see no more drama of this kind. It is still an interesting beach, with the busy fishermen trekking and men at work in boatbuilding sheds. Fine types of Cape fishing craft may be seen there sometimes, gleaming in new paint and ready for launching.

Once I saw a huge school of porpoises trapped within a fringe of kelp, and hunted by fishermen with harpoons. Wounded, the porpoises dashed in mad circles, blowing red jets into the air and jumping clear of the water on to the beach. Porpoise steaks taste like pork, a

delicacy among the coloured fishermen. The beach resembled a butcher's shop that day.

The beach at Rogge Bay, Skate Bay in English, has vanished. In the old days it offered the fishermen better shelter than Woodstock beach; and it was used for the landing of catches even in Van Riebeeck's time. Between the Fish Jetty and the Central Wharf there was for many years a scene of gay colour and energy which was the very essence of old Cape Town. Fish were kept alive in tanks near the square white fish market, a sort of commercial aquarium which would attract many visitors today.

On one occasion a whale, swimming foolishly into the *shallows* at Rogge Bay, became stranded on the beach. Someone *with* a keen eye to business immediately pitched a tent over it and charged sixpence a head for admission. In recent years I have twice seen huge seals hauling themselves out of the sea in Rogge Bay. Shy monsters as a rule, these specimens were seeking a resting place as a result of sickness. It was a queer contrast - these great creatures of the lonely

Antarctic islands crawling on to Cape Town's doorstep to die.

These old beaches swallowed up romance and tragedy with the bones of wrecks and men. Their sands, perhaps, still hide silver ducatoons, spade guineas, gold plate and jewellery. They are part of the huge graveyard of the sea, a mysterious treasure chest which no man can open wide and plunder.

The wild harbour streets of Cape Town, like the "Barbary Coast" of San Francisco, the "Boca" of Buenos Aires, and Cardiff's "Tiger Bay", have been transformed within living memory. They are still changing. The mariners of old who drank their "Cape smoke" thirstily would find it hard to recognise a single landmark today.

Old sunlit streets in which the crews of the East India ships staggered and fought, the taverns they knew so well, the shipyards and whaling stations, the rickety wooden jetties where the cargoes from bluff bowed merchantmen were unloaded - all these are but a memory. The very edge of Table Bay itself, the

beaches where so many swashbuckling dramas were played out, have been covered and reclaimed. One may sigh for the fascinating scenes which will never return, even though the smells and the tragic wrecks of the old waterfront have vanished, too.

Sometimes relics of those stirring times come up from a street trench or a demolished building to remind us of "sharp shot and cold steel"; of ships and men long dead; of warlike days when Cape Town was an outpost open to sudden attack from the sea. Not many years ago the remains of a sea wall, built in the early days of the Cape settlement, came to light during excavations near Dock Road. The date of this work, at which the Dutch were of necessity so skilful, may be judged from the fact that the wall had been built without cement. Skulls and bones of men who had died fighting were found in the same excavation. Long, rusty knives and other crude weapons showed how they had fallen. And, as the digging went on, the walls of an old blockhouse were exposed. The site, now a great

cinema, was thought to be the very beach on which Van Riebeeck's men landed.

I once talked to the foreman of a drainage gang as his men shovelled earth from a trench in another old seafaring street in Cape Town. "We find bones - mainly bones," he told me.

"But I have seen old twisted bottles, and a few coins too, and cannon balls." Sometimes a skeleton wearing legirons is found. There was a spot near the sea known as the "outside place of execution", where, a century ago, all hangings were held in public. A sinister procession marched out there from the Castle, judges, court officials, and armed guard to see the sentences carried out. You may be sure that a skeleton in legirons found near that place was a man who had broken the harsh code of those days - a mutinous sailor, a thief, but not necessarily a murderer.

Of hidden treasures, secret passages and hiding places in these seafaring streets there are many legends; but if discoveries have been made, few indeed have been reported: Slave raids, the terror of the early days, explain the

necessity for such hiding places. Again and again the slaves banded themselves together, looting and killing, until they were captured and taken to Gallows Hill. Much bullion and gold plate were buried on these occasions; with the natural result that the caches were often lost and the treasure with them.

An interesting find was made in recent years during excavations beneath the Cape Town railway station. Here a flight of seaworn steps were uncovered; steps which may well have been built by order of Van Riebeeck himself soon after 1652, so that the sailors could carry their water barrels and vegetables more easily to the waiting boats. The discovery was important, too, because it showed how far the modern city had encroached on the bay.

Close to these steps the navigators of the sixteenth century placed their letters, wrapped in tarpaulins, under the famous "post office stones" in the hope that a ship homeward bound would find them. At a time when there was no white settlement whatever, it proved a fairly satisfactory system. It was in 1900, when the

present railway station was built, that an important collection of "post office stones" came to light. The Hottentots never tampered with the stones; but many letters were destroyed by damp. A number of these stones must still lie buried near the sandy shore of Table Bay. The eighteen stones or fragments recovered, inscribed in French, English, Dutch and Danish, cannot be all that were left when, the Cape was used as a "place of refreshment" by so many ships.

For two hundred years a line of buildings stood along the shore of Table Bay, mainly to serve the shipping. They have all disappeared. Among them was the treadmill, which blocked the lower end of the Heerengracht. At the seafaring end of Waterkant Street there was a sailors' boarding-house, very popular on account of its flat roof from which seaweary tars could survey the shipping in the bay. These boarding-houses, run by "crimps", supplied liquor free to approved customers. But the men were robbed there as sailors are robbed in every seaport. They soon found themselves with aching heads in the fo'c'stles of outward bound ships.

The taverns presumably sold better wine, and many flourished in the old town. Het Blaauw Anker, De Oranje Boom, Het Fransche Cazerne, De Sweedsche Vlag - romantic names for places with thatched roofs and white fronts where men quenched thirsts that had grown during three months and more at sea. They had to beat drums in the streets for three days before a ship left, to warn the roistering sailormen. The "Tavern of the Seas", halfway house to India, claimed many guests; and never were guests so reluctant to leave.

In later years a Cape coloured woman known to her patrons as Black Sophie, ran a boarding-house which was well known to sailors all over the world. Black Sophie was not exactly a pious character, but her dances and free supplies of beer and brandy became famous. Sometimes ordinary citizens would attend; but it was a dangerous game, for any man drunk enough was shanghaied.

The scented merchandise that lay on the wooden wharves of those days brought with it the atmosphere of the East. Cargoes of teak and

ebony lay there, sandalwood and rice, tea and spices, cargoes that men had risked their lives to win. In the houses of the waterfront you would have seen much blue Nankin china, silks and oriental matting and carpets. No train whistles or hooters disturbed that busy waterfront. Out in the bay a sailing ship might fire a salute with her brass cannon. The cries of the redfezzed Malay fishermen, the calling of the birds, creak of cargo tackle and lapping of the tide made up the melody of the evening. An old-time tune that blended perfectly with the sunlight of Old Cape Town's seafaring streets.

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CHAPTER 3

LEPER ISLE

Alcatraz of the convicts, Molokai of the lepers, Heligoland fortress - there is an island in Table Bay which is reminiscent of all three. When you gaze across from Blaauwberg beach and see the full size of Robben Island, with its trees and streets of houses, you may well ask what is to be done with the place.

Robben Island has again become a question mark on the blue South Atlantic. Equipment worth hundreds of thousands of pounds was dumped on the old wooden jetty during the war and hurriedly assembled. Guns, radar and asdic, steamrollers to make an aerodrome, all the material for a degaussing range to beat the magnetic mine ... in those days there was no doubt about Robben Island's role. You could reach the island from the docks by crashboat within seven minutes. A fine new settlement was built, and a safe harbour provided for the first time. But now? No one seems to want Robben Island, the old place of exile and suffering, shipwreck and strange drama.

On more Sundays than I can remember between the wars I sailed over to Robben Island anchorage in Murray Bay and wandered through the leper settlements; and after the lepers were removed in 1931, through the deserted village. From the people of the island and from old records I gathered an outline of this queer island story. Robben Island, "island of seals" when the first explorers landed, lies only six miles from

Table Bay breakwater. A low island, often covered with fog, two miles long and only a mile broad. An hour's sail from Cape Town, yet the island might belong to a different world.

The settlement as I first knew it, twenty years before the evacuation, was a happy place in spite of its purpose as a leper, lunatic and convict station. Prison warders and hospital attendants fishing from the jetty. Healthy looking nurses in the streets. Hospitality everywhere in those days; in the mansion of the Commissioner; at dances in the club; in all the homes of the island. Picnics in fields of lilies, and on the beach on the far side where even now bright beads are washed ashore occasionally from a lost ship.

For a long period there were always at least two thousand people on the island - five hundred officials and their families, a hundred convicts, five hundred lunatics and about a thousand lepers. Even the lepers seemed contented in the days when I sailed over to the island regularly; for the island gave them more freedom than any hospital on the mainland. They had their own gardens and fowls; the government bought their

produce and gave it back to them to eat ! Robben Island was fortunate in its doctors, too, and their devotion to the patients was magnificent.

The officials drew their supplies from a large government store stocking everything except liquor. A bakery, a dairy, a butcher's shop and vegetables grown on the island made housekeeping easy. Although the road running round the island is only seven miles in length, there were a dozen motorcars in use. The weekly steamer brought a programme for the cinema. If life was not exciting for the inhabitants, it was free from many of the problems of the cities.

Lunatics of the quiet types worked as servants in the village. One elderly coloured patient was always to be seen building boats from fragments of wreckage - odd craft indeed, invariably broken up by the attendants before they were ready for launching. This ruthless, though necessary action did not disturb the old fellow in the least. He simply set to work on a new vessel. Occasionally he varied his occupation by making "coins" with bits of brass, carving an unflattering portrait of Queen Victoria on each one.

Among the dangerous patients was a woman who had set fire to a number of churches, and twice succeeded in producing a blaze in the Robben Island asylum. Wellbehaved lunatics were admitted to the staff dances, however, and the daughter of a former Commissioner relates that her favourite partner was a murderer who had poisoned several people. He danced well and was most polite.

There have been macabre scenes in the settlement. One night, many years ago, a huge cask of rum drifted on to the beach. The lepers broke out, taking their pannikins, and on the shore there was a mad carousal. In the 'eighties of last century the lepers were wretchedly housed and fed. Many complaints brought no redress. So one night they set fire to their hovels and forced the Government to build new homes for them.

It is clear that the lepers were not always so welltreated as those I knew. A visiting physician in 1881 reported: "Here I saw human beings kennelled worse than dogs. In a long, low, thatched shed some forty poor creatures were

stowed away, most of them unable to leave their beds. They would be burnt alive if the thatch caught fire. Here were black, half-caste and white all mixed together, but no females."

A last scene, worthy of Grand Guignol, in the leper section of Robben Island. The story is true, for I found it in the official records. A commission arrived to hear the grievances of the lepers, the pitiful appeals of men who thought themselves cured and wished to return to their families; of poor souls driven desperate by long exile. Though leprosy is not infectious and only slightly contagious, the lepers were not allowed to approach the members of the commission, seated at their table. Guards stood between the muttering lepers and the visitors. A member asked why these strict precautions were being taken. "We discovered a plot among the lepers to infect you gentlemen with the disease," answered the head guard. Such are the lengths to which loneliness will move a body of wretched men.

Soon afterwards, Dr. W. Ross was appointed superintendent, and conditions improved. In

1886 the island had its own newspaper, the "Robben Island Times."

Lepers are peculiarly liable to chest complaints, and for a long time it was felt that Robben Island, swept by sea winds and swamped by fogs, was an unsuitable spot for a leper hospital. As the years passed, leprosy decreased in South Africa; among white people, in fact, the disease is showing a tendency to disappear entirely. The cost of upkeep of an island establishment became too high for the number of patients maintained. Finally the lepers were removed to a central hospital at Pretoria and the only people left on the island were the lighthousekeepers and their families. There has been a light on Robben Island since 1657, when Van Riebeeck erected an iron platform on which a fire was kept burning whenever ships of the Company were sighted off the port.

The staff, who had found life on Robben Island pleasant enough, were reluctant to abandon their solid homes. Every year after 1931 some of them chartered a small steamer and spent a day of pathetic reunion in their ruined

gardens. Once a southeast gale arose and marooned them all for several days.

I sailed there often after the settlement had been abandoned. Birds were nesting in the broken windmills. Rabbits scuttled out of the power station which had once lit up the whole island. Sea birds had found shelter in the pretty summer houses and bathingboxes along the shore. The gaol gates had been unlocked for the last time. Grass was growing thickly over the trolley lines that run all over the island; and the trolleys we pushed and rode furiously down the slopes were rusting under the sun. The gardens, once bright with dahlias and carnations, were desolate. The white houses with their red roofs, and the solid grey stone buildings hewn by convict labour will not decay for many years; but the sports ground, the golf course and the cultivated land had dropped back to the wild appearance of the surrounding rabbitwarrens. The club had been gutted, the billiard tables and large library sold. Spread out on the floor I found a tattered island flag, bearing the lighthouse

emblem. And outside on the uncut lawn there remained a captured German fieldgun.

Many of the houses stood open, doors and windows swinging to every wind, broken chairs and old official papers littering the floors. The church, more than a century old, was locked. Convicts built the church, too; the hardworking convicts who made life easy and cheap for officials and their families. Life on this leper island, in the twentieth century at any rate, was not the misery you might imagine. I moved among contented groups of lepers entertaining friends from the mainland. Many of them suffered no pain for years at a stretch, and little disfigurement. But in the long buildings, behind the barbed wire fences, were others sorely afflicted, the poor creatures who were leper-lunatics. There I dared not enter.

Murray Bay, where I left my small yacht at anchor, was once the site of a whaling station owned by a Mr. Murray. The enterprise had to be abandoned for a queer reason. Makanna the Left-Handed, a Xosa chief who had attacked the Grahamstown settlers in 1819, was exiled on

Robben Island. He organised a band of prisoners, seized one of Murray's whaleboats and pulled away from the island. The boat capsized in the surf on Blaauwberg beach and Makanna was drowned. The sequel to this episode was that Murray was given notice to quit, and he had to set up his whaling station on the mainland.

Eight condemned criminals, handed over to the English East India Company to be marooned at the Cape (then, in 1618, inhabited only by savages) were the first Robben Island settlers. The directors of the Company saw a chance of trading with the Hottentots and establishing gardens for the supply of fresh vegetables to their ships. No volunteers for service in the perilous outpost having come forward, the directors petitioned James I to pardon a number of men condemned to death. Thus the unwilling criminals found themselves marooned on the shores of Table Bay with guns, ammunition, food and a small open boat.

They were left in charge of Captain Cross, who had been a member of the King's Bodyguard -- a quarrelsome bully. Cross soon

antagonised the Hottentots. He was attacked, and, according to the narrative of a survivor, "shot full of arrows and spears". The criminals escaped in their boat and made for Robben Island as the most obvious refuge. Their boat was so severely damaged while landing that it could not be repaired.

They lived as castaways on dry biscuits they had saved, eked out with penguin eggs and fish. Six months later a ship called the New Year's Gift was sighted, and the desperate men set to work to build a raft. Four of the men, afraid to wait for daybreak, paddled off with this driftwood contraption and were not seen again. Their companions, however, were rescued from the island next day and given a passage to England.

There was a grim sequel to this stroke of good fortune. The men stole a purse soon after landing. They were tried, declared habitual criminals, and the old sentence of death was enforced.

Van Riebeeck made Robben Island a penal settlement later in the seventeenth century. His

men found hundreds of sheep grazing there; sheep left by British shipmasters some years previously. Van Riebeeck was also the first man to fortify the island with "a six pounder from the Maris". The prisoners, the legions who followed, were kept busy quarrying the blue island stone for buildings on the mainland.

Robben Island has had many superintendents, but the first of them all was Ryk Overhagen of the Dutch East India Company. In 1658, Van Riebeeck's Council decided to reward him for his faithful service at the fortress and on land journeys, and gave him this appointment at fourteen florins a month. No doubt a florin went a long way.

Overhagen looked after the sheep and cattle placed on the island for safety from native thieves: He was expected to keep up a flourishing garden and send carrots and sweet potatoes to the mainland. He fired the first signal gun from the island, and carried out experiments with fire beacons to assist ships entering Table Bay. It is recorded that a steenbok was shot on Robben Island during Overhagen's period there,

but this must surely have been a captured buck which had been transported to the island. Partridges and pheasants were introduced by Governor Adrian van der Stel early in the eighteenth century.

The first escape from Robben Island was reported in 1731, when seven men put to sea in a little boat which was no more than a framework covered with skins. Governor de la Fontaine ordered a commando out to search the coast from Blaauwberg to Groenekloof, and four of the fugitives were found. Their frail craft had, of course, overturned in the surf and the other three had been drowned. Many another prisoner risked his life, and lost it more often than not, by paddling away from Robben Island with a raft or barrel.

Captain Cook visited the island in 1776, and not long afterwards came Le Vaillant, the French traveller and naturalist. Le Vaillant wrote: "The island takes its name from the number of marine dogs that are found there. Its unhappy exiles are each day to deliver a certain quantity of limestone, which they dig. In spare time they

fish, or cultivate their small gardens, which procures them tobacco and some other little indulgences." On the north side of the island are still to be seen the remains of these old garden boundaries and circular stone walls.

No doubt other unofficial visitors trod the sandy shores of Robben Island long before Van Riebeeck's day. They left little but the inevitable legends of buried treasure. Possibly these pirates were responsible for the introduction of the English wild rabbit, a brown species entirely different from the dassies, hares and rabbits of South Africa, and found nowhere on the mainland. Today the island is an enormous rabbitwarren. This is more remarkable than it may seem, for there is not much of the grass rabbits love. Moreover, hundreds of cats that ran wild after a taste of rabbit flesh during the years when the island was occupied, live in the warrens and prey on the rabbits. Robben Island became a sportsmen's paradise in the early nineteenth century. Young officers of the British garrison, sent there as a punishment and to keep

them out of debt, shot quail, pheasants and rabbits and enjoyed the good fishing.

Among the few successful escapes from Robben Island was that of two brothers named Carel and Jacob Kruger, sentenced for coining late in the eighteenth century. They made a boat of skins, reached the coast near Blaauwberg and tramped northwards to Saldanha. Then they left civilisation behind for the unknown interior, where no white man had ever been before. Carel Kruger was trampled to death by an elephant - there is still a farm called Carel's Graf in the Prieska district. Jacob lived on as an outlaw for twenty years, with the shadow of Robben Island always over him. Finally he received a free pardon, only to be killed by a lion soon afterwards.

When the British occupied the Cape for the second time in 1806, they retained Robben Island as a penal settlement. A British merchant ship, the Elizabeth, at anchor off the island, was boarded by twelve convicts. They seized muskets, locked the captain and crew in their quarters and took the ship to sea. Once away

from the island the convicts set the officers and crew adrift in the longboat. These men reached Cape Town safely, and a warship hurried after the Elizabeth. The twelve desperate convicts were recaptured and sent back to Robben Island with long sentences.

The stretch of icy water between the island and the docks forms South Africa's "Channel Swim". Many have attempted it and only a few have succeeded. The first man to swim from Robben Island to the mainland is also the only one - Mr. H. C. Hooper, who covered the distance in just under seven hours on September 4, 1909. He used the breast stroke.

It is a far more difficult swim than the English Channel crossing, as the Table Bay water is seldom above fifty degrees Fahrenheit, whereas the Channel is usually above sixty-five. Women seem to feel the cold less than men, and four women have completed the Robben Island swim. Two of them, Mercedes Gleitze (1932) and Asta Winckler (1934) were already famous when they tackled the freezing currents of Table Bay. But the most popular success was one which I

watched from start to finish - the great swim by the fifteen-year-old schoolgirl Peggy Duncan in November, 1926. There were sharks about that day, and I was in charge of a small craft chartered by the newspaper which had organised the swim. The contest was nearly called off; but we decided that Peggy Duncan was well protected, and nine hours thirty-five minutes after leaving Robben Island the strong; sunburnt girl reached the old Adderley Street pier. The second woman to accomplish the feat, during the following year, was Miss Florrie Berndt, a Robben Island nurse. In 1930 Peggy Duncan swam the English Channel.

Off the rockfringed shore of Robben Island lies the "boneyard", the unfrequented stretch of ocean where old ships, stripped of their fittings, are taken out and sunk. You can see the rusty iron, the boilers and stumps of masts of the wrecks of recent years along the northern shore. But of two famous vessels lost there, which stand out in my mind from a long and tragic procession of doomed ships, nothing remains above the surface. One was the mail steamer Tantallon

Castle, piled up in the early morning of May 7, 1901 in a dense fog with 120 passengers on board. The other was the Dageraad - and that is a tale of sunken treasure which I shall presently tell.

The Tantallon Castle wreck was noteworthy because she was the only regular mail steamer on the Cape run ever lost in Table Bay. She had been passing through fog for some hours before the disaster; but Captain de la Cour Travers had taken soundings and was satisfied that he was on a safe course. Double lookouts had been posted. The captain was on the bridge. Suddenly the lookout shouted a warning - he had seen a patch of seaweed, indicating land close by. Captain Travers had his hand on the bridge telegraph; he rang down "full astern". Too late. There was, in the words of a passenger, "a thump, a thud, and a slow, grinding impact" as the Tantallon Castle settled down on a reef.

Signal guns were fired, the people of Robben Island hurried to the shore, saw the stranded liner and telephoned to the mainland for help. The master of the little coasting steamer Magnet, first

to arrive, pitched his own deck cargo overboard and sent a whaleboat across to the wreck. All the women and children were transferred, and then the rest of the passengers. Soon harbour tugs were on the spot, with the Braemar Castle, the Avondale Castle, the Raglan Castle of the same company, and H.M.S. Tartar - all ready with towropes and anxious to save the Tantallon Castle from total loss. The mails were taken off safely, and most of the baggage, but the ship resisted every effort to drag her away from the teeth of the rocks. Photographs taken that day show her lying broadside on to the swell - a fine ship at the time, with three masts, one funnel, and the firstclass quarters aft, according to old-fashioned custom. Captain Travers and the crew left her sadly. Not one life had been lost; but the water was rising in the holds and soon afterwards she broke up. The court of inquiry left the captain's certificate untouched, but considered that he should have taken more soundings. A recommendation that a fog signal should be placed on Robben Island was followed by the government - half the lighthouses and fog signals

of the world have been provided only as a result of shipwrecks. So the Robben Island gun, known to thousands of sailormen in after years, boomed over the bones of the Tantallon Castle.

Of the Dageraad enough is known to establish, beyond doubt, that she was a treasure ship. She was one of a fleet that sailed north from Table Bay in 1694 to salve the cargo of a distressed Dutch East India Company ship named the Goude Buys - the Golden Jacket. News had reached the Cape that the Goude Buys, after a long passage from Holland, had anchored about a hundred miles up the coast with every soul on board ill. Scurvy, of course - the dread sickness which took such toll of the mariners of Holland then, and for years afterwards. Some of the wretched crew of the Goude Buys had landed and tramped overland to the Cape, several perishing of hunger on the march.

When the Dageraad, a small, fast yacht, reached the spot, the Goude Buys had dragged her anchors and drifted ashore. The coast where she lay, however, is sandy and free from danger;

it was easy to salve her specie and cargo. With much precious freight under hatches the Dageraad ran back to Table Bay. Fog caused her end, too - she struck the west end of Robben Island and broke up at once. Sixteen of her men were drowned. It was recorded at the time that "the broken chests washed ashore, but the money is still under the sea".

Since then children have found a few golden ducats and silver pieces of eight in rocky pools. But most of it lies, to this day, in the sand of the green depths beneath the long coils of seaweed, caressed by every tide in the strongroom of the cold South Atlantic. Golden coins, no doubt, with guilders and rixdollars - a romantic hoard awaiting recovery by some diver bold enough to go down there in the sweep and surge of the open ocean. I should like to stand on the beach of Robben Island on the day when the treasure of the Dageraad comes on shore.

The most recent treasure unearthed on Robben Island was found, in August, 1944, by soldiers of the wartime garrison who were digging near the lighthouse. They first found a

skeleton, then a number of silver and copper coins. I examined the coins - they were French, bearing various dates from 1688 to 1726. The large silver coins, about the size of a fiveshilling piece, were handsome and well preserved.

It seemed to the soldiers that the skeleton had not received proper burial. They thought the man might have been a shipwrecked sailor who had died there alone and been covered by the drifting sand. It was just one more tragedy, perhaps, of the island that nobody wants.

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CHAPTER 4

BLAAUWBERG AND THE BEACHES

Now it is time to set out northwards on the edge of Table Bay - northwards along the beaches that would seem neverending if you went all the way on foot.

I hope the journey will be broken so often, and in such unusual company, that you will not find it tiring. The first halt is within sight. It is a white vision at the far edge of the blue bay, the village called Blaauwberg Strand. Among life's

luxuries is one which I have enjoyed more than champagne or cigars; it is a weekend sanctuary away from the city. Years ago I found a cottage at Blaauwberg. In those days you could reach the place by cart, wagon, on horseback or on foot; not by motorcar. Soon afterwards, however, the straight concrete road was built along the dunes and Blaauwberg Strand became known, not only to fishermen, hermits and eccentrics, but to the crowd. Strange to relate, the old Blaauwberg - village of shipwrecks and beachcombers, battleground of Baird and Janssens - has not vanished. You can still find the past among the rocks and in the dunes.

During a thousand walks on this beach I have watched seals hauling out of the sea and porpoises leaping in the surf. Once I found a live bomb with a red ring on the nose. All the sea-birds, from the albatross to the penguin, have rested before my eyes on these sands. I have picked up tempting menus from ships, and examined many a corked bottle in the hope of finding a message. One day I saw a jackal emerge from the bush; often there have been

steenbok. Before breakfast on a foggy morning I observed a crawfish cutter aground, with the crew hurriedly jettisoning their catch so that they might refloat her at high water. I never know what to expect as I pace the firm sands northwards. If wishes counted there would be a treasure chest in the waves. But I am far more likely to find a motorcar being battered by the surf while yet another dismayed driver wrings his hands.

I have seen links with old Blaauwberg. Van Riebeeck was one of the first white men to cross the Great Salt Pan (later the Rietvlei motor speedway) and walk over the firm sands at low tide to the rocky "island". The "Company's Road", made by the northbound exploring wagons of the Dutch East India Company, still survives as deep, sandy tracks on the farm Blaauwberg. Cannonballs are often found in the sandy wastes behind the village. A man whose family has lived at Blaauwberg for more than a century once showed me a thick French copper coin of the early Republican days, one of many coins salvaged from the dunes.

After high winds, parts of the lost homestead of the Dutch East India Company are revealed. This large building, known as Compagnie's Dam, stood close to the present village. The whole place sank gradually into the sand. Fragments of valuable old china and wineglasses have been recovered in recent years from the spot. But the farm lands, the cattle kraals and vineyards, the dam where wagon drivers halted to water their oxen; all these have been engulfed by the merciless dunes. It is said that the last owner of the farm went mad when he saw that the creeping sand was about to drive him from his home.

Much driftwood and timber from old wrecks have gone, from the earliest days, into the cottages of Blaauwberg. The currents run this way, so that whenever a ship is lost in Table Bay the expectant beachcombers watch the incoming tide day and night for their harvest. One tide brought in a figurehead ten feet high - Lord Nelson, so they say. It stands in a garden, cocked hat and epaulettes still weathering the years. A scroll beneath bears the famous message:

"England expects every man this day will do his duty".

The bones of two dead ships, cast ashore to be broken up for their copper towards the end of last century, were visible a few years ago. Probably there are still a few fragments if you look for them. Once these wrecks were huge hulks; they were hacked and torn apart, cut into rafters and palings for cottage fences, or burnt in open hearths. Ton after ton of pitchpine and teak flamed blue on winter nights. The Drotting Sophia, one of these sailing ships was called; and the other was the Pauline. There is hardly a home in Blaauwberg which has not absorbed some flotsam of the sea. Two houses are named after wrecks - Galatea and Hypatia.

First of all the wrecks on the coast near Blaauwberg was the famous Haarlem, which was struck by a violent southeast squall while running into Table Bay three centuries ago, and flung on the beach a total loss. It is recorded that her crew remained near the spot to guard the valuable cargo. They made a garden and shot game; you can still see buck and partridges near

the village. The men of the Haarlem must have been the first settlers of Blaauwberg.

I have made a list of the Blaauwberg wrecks. Among them were the French vessel Severe, a 74-gun ship; the barque Bengal; the German brigantine Oste; the ship Akbar; the brig Rover; and the barque Sappho, with her cargo of tea. Early this century the steamer Hermes dragged her anchors and drifted ashore at night. A ship's boat, hurriedly lowered, capsized, and two young wives were drowned. After that a lifeline to the beach worked well. Even the pigs and cats on board the doomed ship were saved. When the steamer Hypatia was lost on Whale Rock much of her wreckage found its way to Blaauwberg; doors and derricks, lifebuoys, floating fragments that drew many villagers into the surf to claim these gifts as they washed ashore.

It is Sunday evening at Blaauwberg. The last bather has left the sea, the motorcars have struggled out of the loose sand, geese are marching solemnly back to the homestead. As the sun dies I glance towards the silhouette of Robben Island; and there, on the screen of the

mind, I see a great fleet anchored. I am back in that evening of January, 1806, when Sir Home Popham brought his 60 ships and Baird his 6,000 men to these quiet shores.

Diadem, Encounter, Leda, Protector - these ships are covering the beach with their heavy guns. A small transport has been sailed boldly into the line of surf and beached to form a breakwater for the landing of the troops. Heavy seas make this a difficult manoeuvre and a boatload of men of the Highland Brigade sink with their muskets and heavy equipment.

Now, turning towards Rietvlei, I watch another army. Strange how clear are their faces in the sunset; these bearded burghers, fair German mercenaries, dragoons, French sailors, Dutch artillery, Javanese, Hottentots, Mozambique slaves. A queer foreign legion Janssens has gathered to resist the English; small wonder that this army, only two thousand strong, cannot drive the invaders back into the sea. The cannon come into action, but it is soon over. Only a skirmish really, this "Battle of Blaauwberg". The key to India is again in England's hands.

Such was Blaauwberg's part in the history of South Africa - the white village we see on clear afternoons across Table Bay, the village of wrecks and romance.

Blaauwberg is a great place for mussels and other sea foods. One day I met an elderly, rather portly man digging white mussels out of the sand. He had the air of an expert about him, and I paused to see what wisdom of the beaches he might pass on to me. His conversation was far more startling than I had expected.

"It's safe enough here on the sand," remarked the man. "But on the rocks ... that's a different story."

"You mean you may get washed off by the sea?" I inquired politely.

"Not unless you're a fool. Something much worse happened to me."

Back in 1908, he told me, he was wading out to a halfsubmerged reef when he was gripped round the leg by an octopus. He slashed at the tentacle with his sharp bait knife. Another tentacle found a hold round his right arm. Transferring the knife to his left hand he fought

back. But he was really saved by a sea which lifted the octopus on to a rock and disturbed it long enough for him to escape. "I could see the cold eyes staring at me, and I have never forgotten it," he declared with a shudder.

For many years a Mozambique native known as "Mussel Peter" made his living by gathering shellfish along the Blaauwberg coast. His sacks of mussels often appeared on hotel menus as "oyster soup" or "oyster patties". Peter was a true beachcomber. I was always glad when he came to my door with fresh mussels to sell at the modest price of one hundred for a shilling. He died during a cold north-west gale, a victim of the common mistake of sleeping in a closed hut in company with a tin of glowing coals.

Mussels are really as tasty as oysters. The Blaauwberg people put them in vinegar so that they keep for weeks. But the finest mussels I ever ate there were cooked in my cottage by a Belgian. He steamed them over a sauce of butter, onions, celery and white wine; and a chef could have done no better. A rarer delicacy is the perelmoen or klipkous, largest of all the Cape

shellfish. This monster grows far out on the rocks, and can be reached only at very low tides with the aid of a spear. It has a beautiful shell, but the meat must be scrubbed and put through a mincer.

Seaweed jelly is another odd dish often made in the cottages along this coast. You have to collect the light brown ribbons of seaweed which cling to the long stalks of seabamboo. Boil for three hours, and it becomes a pure jelly which may be flavoured with fruit juices. This is the local remedy for chest afflictions, and I believe the recipe has some medical support.

"No one is poor who lives by the shore," runs the old saying. While it is to be doubted very much whether the beachcombers of Blaauwberg could live entirely on what they find, they have made valuable discoveries from time to time.

These beachcombers are not the disreputable characters of fiction. They are fishermen, farmers, odd job men of the coastal belt who keep a watchful eye on the hard sandy beaches and the sea. They know where to find Bushman pottery in the dunes; they recite the local treasure

legends and lead parties in search of them willingly - for a consideration. Not an expensive way of buying romance, after all.

Watch the beachcomber pacing the long beaches, watch him at work after a nor'-west gale has stirred up the seafloor and swept lost fragments ashore. He walks with head bent forward, scanning the wet sands, the ripples and marks left by the ebb tide, the shells and seaweed. He can read signs that mean nothing to those that are not of his trade. If there is treasure here it will not escape him.

His keen old eyes have seen this beach strewn with carpets, cases of whisky and sweets. That was after the loss of the mail steamer Tantallon Castle on Robben Island. Another wreck supplied candles and condensed milk, unspoilt by the sea. Once a huge cargo of tea in tinfoil came up with the breakers. They tried to use the tea, but it was impregnated with salt, so the beachcombers made piggots of lead out of the wrappings.

One of my beachcomber friends described the funeral of a small wooden sailing ship years ago.

"They towed her out of Table Bay Docks with nothing but rats on board," he said. "No, the rats did not know she was doomed. Between Robben Island and Blaauwberg beach they made full sail, and cast her adrift. She came pitching along towards the Blaauwberg rocks, struck an outlying reef and remained fast, her sails still drawing. Then five great seas struck her. She vanished before our eyes - there was nothing left but matchwood when the last sea passed over her."

This man owns a little boat which has paid for itself again and again. He has fished from it and shot seals for their skins and oil. Sometimes he visits the little rocky islet off Blaauwberg to collect duikers' eggs. And when the sea is very calm he searches for the old treasure ship his grandfather once showed him.

"I was young then - I never thought of fixing the position by marks on shore," he told me. "But I - saw the ship through the clear water after a south-easter, lying on her side with bars of silver in her hold. If I find her again I'll mark

the spot, even if I have to drop my best crawfish net."

A Woodstock fishing boat once raised an old brass cannon in the nets; but it was too heavy to lift into the boat, the nets broke and a valuable relic was lost.

Then there is the story (which the beachcomber swears is true) of the two farmers who found an iron box left by the tide. There was a coloured boy with them, and they sent him for an axe. Then they opened the box; and when the boy returned they showed him that it was empty. But my friend declares that the box was full of money, and that those two farmers were prosperous for the rest of their lives.

Strictly speaking, of course, all treasure trove should be handed over to the Government. Flotsam, which means portions of a wreck or her cargo, and jetsam, goods thrown overboard to lighten a ship do not belong to the finder. In practice it is only when large quantities of goods drift ashore that Customs officers guard the coast.

The botanist who turns beachcomber on the South African coast will find much of intense interest. The Mocambique and Agulhas currents on the East Coast, and the Brazilian and South Atlantic connecting currents on the west bring floating seeds, plants, logs of wood, pumice and corals from far countries. Some of the seeds germinate when they reach the South African coasts after voyages of thousands of miles lasting for months or years.

The most historic discovery ever made in the Blaauwberg sands, of course, was a corroded Portuguese sword. It was identified as the sword of Don Francisco d'Almeida, killed with sixty of his men at Blaauwberg in 1501 by the Hottentots.

There is no knowing what the ocean currents may cast up, for stagnation is unknown in the sea and the great flow of the waters is never checked. Even the strong Agulhas current is variable; the arrows shown on the chart must be taken only as an indication. But always there comes a day when currents and tides join forces to throw on land at last something that will catch

the beachcomber's eye. There is treasure and mystery on the beaches for those who know where to seek such things.

More mysterious than any submerged wreck was the "Tygerberg ship," a buried ship found several miles from the Blaauwberg coast.

The Tygerberg ship (if ship it was) first received publicity in the fifties of last century, when prospectors were searching the mountain slopes for coal. Traces of steam coal had been noticed there much earlier, but now the growth of steam shipping made a careful survey desirable. The ship was reported by Sir Charles Bell, then Government land surveyor. He found it at a spot where John Barrow, author of "Travels into the Interior of South Africa, 1805," had seen fossilised wood and oyster shells. Sir Charles Bell declared: "However strange it may seem, I believe this wood belongs to an old vessel wrecked in the days when the sea broke on beaches on Lion's Head, now hundreds of feet above high-water mark."

An engineer named A. G. Bain now came forward and said he had known of the existence

of the ship for forty years. It was buried in a deep ditch and had mighty ribs. Bain, however, suggested that it might be a bed of lignite coal; the remains were so ancient that it was impossible to decide.

Sir Charles Bell was more definite. He had seen the side of a ship about seventy feet long, he said, lying on the bank of the Hardekraaltjie River near the present eleventh milestone on the Malmesbury road. When first seen, the ribs and bow had protruded about five feet above the clay patch, but pieces had been broken off from time to time and dragged away. A sample was sent to England for examination but could not be identified. Sir Charles Bell thought the wreck should be hauled out, as it might be one of the Phoenician galleys sent round Africa by Pharaoh Necho 2,500 years ago. The Government was not prepared to spend the money, and today it would be hard to find a trace of this interesting discovery.

Blaauwberg is as good a place as any if you wish to see the toilers of the trek nets at work. Countless adventures with heavy weather,

strange sea creatures and the peril of the sea have gone unrecorded since the rich fishing grounds of Table Bay were first discovered. Yet a bold tradition has been built up by men who work in open boats. Their daily lives, their escapes and achievements form a stirring page in the drama of these shores.

Crowds still gather when the bulging net of harders or maasbankers is hauled glistening into the shallows. The work has an elemental appeal. This is the scene that must be counted among the earliest memories of all who lived in Cape Town as children.

"Draw the net for some fish for the crew," ordered Johan van Riebeeck on the day he reached Table Bay as Governor of the Cape. To-day there are still fishermen drawing nets of very much the same type, using open boats of the old design, and landing their catches on the beaches.

If you walk along the Blaauwberg beach on a calm summer morning soon after dawn you may see a blue jerseyed man making a smoke fire on the beach. He is the "land skipper" of a boat waiting off shore for his signal. A dozen signs

the inexperienced eye would miss speak plainly to him of the presence of shoals of fish. He sees the broken water, the birds diving. The smoke he sends up means the fish are far out. Sometimes he points or whistles, occasionally he throws up sand as a mark of urgency. The boat skipper follows every movement while the crew strain at the oars.

First the sixty fathom rope must be brought to the shore. Then begins the race to surround the shoal with the finely meshed net. Fathom after fathom goes sweeping over the stern as the boat careers in a strenuous arc. At last a hundred and fifty fathoms are out and the boat returns to the shore, the men go over the side, waistdeep, and drag the lines that hold the seine and its burden.

Where the beach is smooth and sandy there is no risk, unless the weight of the catch itself breaks the net. Fishing skippers carry in their minds a complete picture of the shores along which they work. Every rock and submerged wreck is engraved on that invisible chart. For a new trek net costs a fortune nowadays, and is easily torn. Even when all the known

obstructions are avoided, there are movements after severe gales of heavy timber embedded in the sand. Thus the fishermen are always adding new sections to old nets. They can never tell the age of a net; it has been patched so often that it remains in use long after the original twine has disappeared. Great faith is shown in the value of sundrying, steaming and "bleeding" to preserve nets.

I do not think there is a coast in the world where open fishing boats are more ably handled under sail, in waters where the summer southeasters blow with hurricane force and the north-westers of winter bring in greybacked combers of terrifying heights. Naturally the fishermen pick their weather; but they are "caught out" often enough, and it is then that these skippers display magnificent qualities of seamanship.

The fishermen work on a share system that must have originated centuries ago. Twelve shares there are, two for the vulnerable net, one for the boat, and one and a half for the skipper. The price of the rest of the catch goes to the eight men forming the crew. It is a gamble which

possesses a great appeal. When the net lands thirty thousand harders successfully, there will be several pounds for each man. In the summer, between the southeast gales, a fisherman may earn £8 a week. Then there are days of inactivity.

Treknets are used throughout the year, whenever conditions are favourable. The fishermen vary their employment at the different seasons, however, and roam the coast for hundreds of miles in larger craft. January finds most of them out in motorboats that tow fleets of dinghies and work close inshore where the crawfish swim among the seaweed and the rocks. In May the voracious hordes of snoek (named after the fresh water pike of Holland, but really a barracouta) arrive in Table Bay. A good snoek season means real prosperity.

Snoek are caught by each boat's crew at the rate of a thousand to three thousand a day. The skill lies entirely in the manner in which this struggling, sharpfinned, sevenpound fish is hauled in and killed. It leaps madly for hooks decorated with red rags or sharkskin, and is captured easily on a plain, unbarbed hook. It

fights all the way to the deck, and even the cleverest hands receive poisonous wounds in the course of a season.

When the snoek vanish on their mysterious migration, the fishermen turn to less feverish line fishing. September brings the opening of another long crawfish season.

But as I have said, the trek nets are never stowed away. There are still dark nights when, as an old fisherman described it to me, "the water is on fire with fish". Boats are used, and also a small type of trek net which is carried into the surf from the beach by four men. I recall a night on Blaauwberg beach when I accompanied a night trekking party and took part in the blind haul. A spot is chosen where fish may be expected to be found. There is no certainty. The net is carefully stacked to run easily, and the leader rushes chestdeep into the cold breakers while the others follow, dropping the ninety yards of net in the effort to surround the fish before they can escape. It is all over in a couple of minutes. The net cannot be cast again that tide at the same place, for fish are easily frightened.

Results of a night trek may be both dangerous and spectacular, for fish of many species come in to feed in the darkness and the haul often provides the variety of an aquarium. A sudden cry of "pael stert" warns the barelegged men that a creature with a tail like a whip is floundering in the net. If the poisoned barb strikes flesh, a foot or a hand may be lost. Then there is the electric skate, with an organ between the head and pectoral fins which delivers a shock powerful enough to send a man flat on his back. Sand sharks are flung contemptuously aside. If the fishermen are lucky, there are thousands of galjeon, steenbras or harders in the bag.

Galjoen is one of many romantic Cape fish names. Apparently the early fishermen found something in common between this fish and the galleons that called at the Cape. A brighthued fish was called the "dageraad", the day dawn. And most vivid of all is the "jacopiver", derived from Jacob Evertson, a wellknown master mariner. Evertson traded between the Cape and the East Indies. His red face was pitted with smallpox and patchy with black beard, and his

eyes bulged unpleasantly. While no portrait of the captain exists, the "jacopiver" fish is said to perpetuate the likeness.

Sharks occasionally take the fishermen's bait, but the man-eater seldom becomes a menace. Nevertheless, fishing boats have been attacked. Not many years ago I saw broken shark's teeth removed from the keel of a Blaauwberg boat. There, too, I heard the story of a shark hunt in which Mr. Stubbs, a Cape treasury official, flung the harpoon. For a time the shark towed the boat; then it turned and gripped the planking. They cut the shark adrift and made the beach with the boat filling rapidly. The blind rage of a wounded shark may not be so awe inspiring as that of a harpooned whale, but a blow from the tail is dangerous enough. Within sight of the sea about twenty-five miles north of Blaauwberg is a village of two thousand people who have learnt the secrets of contentment and plenty.

It is a village with a romantic story; first of all a farm of the Dutch East India Company, then a military post, a hunting station, a salt factory, and finally a mission settlement. A village where

there are no taxes worth mentioning; with good food and shelter for all, and work for every man who wishes to find it; a village of green gardens and fruit, old oaks, almond trees, a water mill, and one group of white, thatched houses built in 1697. Groene Kloof was the old name of this pleasant valley. I prefer it to the Biblical name of Mamre which it now bears.

Groene Kloof lay in the track of the first of the Company's exploring wagons bound from Table Bay to Saldanha and the north. It was not long before the Company, ever anxious to increase the supply of fresh stores for the tall ships calling at the "Tavern of the Seas" established a corn farm and cattle station at Groene Kloof. Wild Bushmen and Hottentots raided the unprotected farm; and so a fort was built and Dragoons were sent to beat off their attacks. You can still see the remains of the solid stone walls of the "werf" from which the soldiers fired their flintlocks at the men with bows and arrows. A red petrol pump stands close beside the old defences. Motorists bound for Darling rush past the poplars and weeping willows of

Groene Kloof, over the hard road that was a wagontrack not long ago.

But Mamre has not altered greatly since it was given as a reserve to the remnants of those Hottentot clans, the Cochoquas, Goringhaiquas and Gorachouquas, who owned all the Cape when the first white men arrived. Smallpox and brandy were exterminating these yellow, wizened people of the past at the time when they were gathered together at Groene Kloof. Then, in 1808, Lord Caledon placed the good Moravian missionaries in charge, the hardworking Germans who had already formed a successful station at Genadendal. No whites were allowed to farm at Groene Kloof. The same rule applies today; indeed, no outsiders of any colour are allowed to join the Mamre folk.

The Rev. W. Winckler, the missionary, showed me the mission records, pages in faded ink more than a century old. The same family names appear in the books of the mission today. Fine old prints there were, too, depicting the Groene Kloof settlement at different periods. It was a flourishing place when the traveller

Backhouse visited it and found two wide streets and a thousand Hottentots at work. "The people," he wrote, "lived first in rush huts, then hartebeest houses, and later in neat cottages. A man is allowed as much garden ground as he can work."

Nowadays the mission does not control the farming at Mamre; there is a Village Management Board. The system of land tenure is complicated. No man owns the land he works, though he regards it as his property. The land belongs to the community as a whole, and no strip of it, not even a house, may be sold to an outsider. In the old days the idea was that each head of a family should receive one house, one or two gardens, and one sowing land - enough to produce from twelve to fifteen bags of wheat. This wheat was the quantity estimated to keep a family in bread for a year.

No slave labour was ever employed at Mamre. The last inhabitant who was born in slavery died not many years ago. The Hottentots were not enslaved by the Dutch East India Company, as some people believe; but when a

Hottentot woman had children by a slave the children became slaves.

The Mamre people, a mixture of clans from the start, have lost all trace of tribal customs. Their daily life is bound up with the church which has fathered them. They are as old fashioned as the kopdoeks worn by the women.

I climbed the hill above the missionary's house, once the residence of the military post commander, and observed the stone walls of the "langhuis", now a storeroom, but formerly the barracks. Near the graveyard was a circular threshing floor of hard mud. Here the men were beating out the rye, and separating the grain from the chaff by the Biblical method of winnowing. "They are all small farmers, and they like to do everything for themselves, instead of buying a threshing machine," explained the missionary.

From the hilltop we could see Dassen Island and a dozen interesting landmarks. One was Kannon Kop. I climbed up there, and found the old signal cannon still rusting on the summit," said the missionary. "Down in the village you see the Mooimaaks River that supplies us with

water and never dries up. After a long journey from the north, farmers used to outspan here, get out their best clothes, wash in the river and prepare for the arrival in Cape Town. I think that is how the river got its name. To the south lies the farm Laatste Stuur, which someone evidently bought with his last halfpenny."

Between Mamre and the ocean you can see long white dunes topped with green. At New Year the Mamre people flock in hundreds to camp at Modder River mouth and Bok Bay. There are fishermen in this inland village of Mamre. Some of the farmers near the coast own boats, which are manned by the Mamre men. Dassen Island provides them with crawfish, but the most welcome food they can bring back to the village is salted snoek, beloved by coloured folk all over the Cape Province. In heavy weather, an old fisherman told me, the open boats had sometimes to run before the gale all the way to Table Bay for shelter. The sea has taken toll of the sons of Mamre.

From where we stood on the hill we could see many of the rich gardens of Mamre, with their

crops of pumpkins and maize, beans, potatoes and cabbages. Living in Mamre is cheap. Between the wars there were houses to let at half a crown a month, while the mission hired a comfortable dwelling with a large garden for a school teacher at ten shillings. Another teacher paid £3 a month for all his meals and washing.

I visited houses of all types with the missionary. Some had modern furniture, pianos, and all the signs of prosperity. Many of the stoeps were shaded by trellises of vines. Nearly all were neatly thatched. Even the poorest of them, such as that where lived two women each nearing a hundred years of age, were more comfortable than the hovels of the Cape Flats. One end of every house was a huge fireplace and oven. Strong walls, often two feet thick, are necessary to support the thatch. Under the thatch you notice cobwebs, strings of onions and gardening tools. Pictures of Queen Victoria and religious calendars decorate the walls.

The Moravian Church at Mamre delights the eye of every passing architect. Swallows, trapped in the building, were flying beneath the

impressive yellowwood ceiling when we entered. In the vestry there is a board with the names of benefactors of the church and the amounts in rix dollars that they subscribed - several of them men who made history in South Africa.

I should like to stand outside that old church at Mamre in the half light on Easter Morning, when all the people of the village gather in procession and march, singing hymns, to the burial ground. There the names of those who have died since the previous Easter are read. Relations and friends of the dead travel long distances to be present. It is a last rite. And just as the sun rises the procession moves down to the church in the valley, in Groene Kloof under Mamre Berg.

Such are the simple people of the old-fashioned village of Mamre - one hour from Cape Town by motorcar, but once a journey of several days by oxwagon.

On the coast near Mamre I once encountered as deep a mystery as anything I had seen on land or sea. It was a hot, dull afternoon in December, 1935, when the telephone carried a faint voice

over the country line into my office in Cape Town.

"Whales are hurling themselves on to the rocks at the Grotto - hundreds of whales," said the voice.

It sounded incredible. I picked up my camera, drove to the spot and found it was true. The sand and the rock pools of Grotto beach were red with the blood of three hundred dead and dying whales. Some lay breathing stertorously under the sun. Round others the greedy sea birds were crying and settling for the feast. Swollen tongues jutted from the toothed jaws of the whales. Long black bodies gleamed. Fins and tails showed where scores of the dead heaved in the surf beyond the rocks. For a mile the beach was a strange graveyard of these creatures of the sea.

"They came in suddenly through the breakers, leaping over the rocks," a farmer told me. "It was a determined dash, and those that survived the battering threw themselves on, and on, until they reached the sand. Not one tried to return to open sea. They made tremendous efforts to jump over all obstacles. Something drove them on shore. I

would never have imagined such a thing if I had not seen it."

The farmer now knows that he is one of very few men in the world who have seen the death agony of the False Killer Whales. A sight to remember indeed. A thing which no scientist can explain. Scientists, when they heard of it, hurried to the lonely beach to solve the problem. Among them was Mr. G. W. Rayner, marine biologist of the whaling research ship William Scoresby, which (by a happy coincidence) was then fitting out for an Antarctic cruise in Table Bay Docks. I helped Mr. Rayner to measure the whales. I saw him, rip open carcase after carcase in quest of a possible explanation of the mystery. From him, and from Dr. Leonard Gill, then director of the South African Museum, I learnt the few weird facts that are known about False Killer Whales.

The False Killer, in spite of its name, is a true whale, a miniature whale, perhaps, but nevertheless a mammal that suckles its young and belongs to the great family of cetacea. All whales are not giants, and the false killers, like

the pilot whales and killers, may be classed with the dolphin group.

The story of the False Killers begins in the second century, when the Greek writer Oppian declared: "This other excellent deed of the Dolphins have I heard and admire. When fell disease and fatal draws nigh to them, they fail not to know it but are aware of the end of life. Then they flee the sea and the wide waters of the deep and come aground on the shallow shores. And there they give up their breath and receive their doom upon the land; that so perchance some mortal man may take pity on the holy messenger of the Shaker of the Earth when he lies low, and cover him with mound of shingle, remembering his gentle friendship; or haply the seething sea herself may hide his body in the sands; nor any of the brood of the sea behold the corpse of their lord, nor any foe do despite to his body even in death. Excellence and majesty attend them even when they perish, nor do they shame their glory even when they die."

Scientists, however saw no reason to accept this "excellent deed" as a fact until the year

1927. Up to that year, the False Killer Whale was regarded as an extinct species. A fossilised skull had been found in the Lincolnshire fens late last century, and had been given a Latin name. In 1927 a school of about a hundred whales was stranded on the coast of Scotland, and British Museum officials were staggered by the discovery that these whales were of the identical species represented by the skull.

Thus the False Killer Whale thrust itself for the first time on the attention of a world entirely ignorant of its presence. Then only were marked differences between the killer and the False Killer discovered. The killer is conspicuously marked with creamy patches over the eye and along the flank. The False Killer is black all over. Both species have formidable teeth. These are to be expected in the killer, which attacks larger whales and tears away the blubber for food: In the False Killer, feeding on cuttlefish and squids, such large teeth are remarkable.

To return to 1927 and the first identification of the False Killer. Museums and universities everywhere applied for skeletons of the stranded

specimens. A great deal of - research was done, but the mystery of the stranding did not arouse much speculation at the time. It was overlooked in the sensation caused by the appearance of the False Killers themselves. Since then, however, False Killer Whales have been racing to death on beaches as far apart as South Africa, Zanzibar and Tasmania. The "mass suicide", as it has been loosely termed, has become more important than the whales themselves. Before discussing theories it is necessary to study the facts of these widelyseparated strandings.

The first appearance of the False Killers in South Africa was on Christmas Eve, 1928, when about a hundred (note the similarity in numbers to the Scottish stranding) flung themselves on to the white, sandy beach at Kommetjie, near Cape Point. There are no rocks on this part of the coast, and the whales reached the shore uninjured, many of them remaining alive for several days until, in fact, they died of starvation. Some of the females gave birth to young ones on the beach; but the possibilities of examination of

unborn calves were not realised at the time and the whales were buried.

One significant fact emerges from the Kommetjie stranding. Kindly people who arrived soon after the whales had leapt clear of highwater mark tried to save the lives of a few of the smaller whales, six- and seven-footers, by carrying them back to the sea and guiding them towards deep water. The whales would have none of it. No sooner did they recover the use of their powerful bodies than they leapt once more to the beach. Many attempts were made to carry out this fantastic "lifesaving", but it soon became evident that the whales preferred the beach. It was impossible to give the larger whales a chance of life, for they weighed a ton and measured nineteen feet from jaws to tail.

The Tasmanian stranding occurred only a few weeks before the second visit of the False Killers to South Africa, the Grotto affair which I described. There were about three hundred whales in the Tasmanian school; just about the same number, you will remember, as the Grotto



An old Hottentot woman gazes at the hundreds of False Killer Whales, stranded mysteriously on the coast near Mamre, Cape Province.

school. A farmer, aroused by the noise of tails thrashing the sand, saw a black mass stretching for half a mile. The False Killers revealed no signs of illness. They were not cast ashore by heavy weather, for it was a calm night with no wind. Details of the Zanzibar stranding are lacking, save for the cabled story that the whales arrived in such numbers that "they covered a small coral islet".

Now the theories. First and most obvious is the possibility of the leader of the school finding itself in surf or shallow water, losing its head, and leading a flurried rush in the wrong direction. I tested this by walking, south from Grotto beach in search of more whales. I found one lying far up on a sandy beach a full mile from the rest of the school. The same instinct, or misfortune, had brought this lone creature to death. It was plain that it had followed no leader and that it had not been swept there by the tide.

I talked to the fishermen of the coast. Could the whales have been frightened by some larger or more fearsome sea animal? No, they had seen

nothing, there was nothing to scare a whale out of the sea.

An interesting idea, linking the two South African strandings, was this; the sea once covered large areas of the Cape Peninsula, including both the narrow neck of land at Kommetjie, and the low coast where Grotto beach lies. Were the leaders of the two lost schools seeking an old passage, an ancient sea route followed by the schools of long ago? Whales do not find their way round the world by chance. They live for hundreds of years, they learn, and they pass on their knowledge as an instinct to their young. The idea of a navigating sense which happened to lead to disaster cannot be entirely ignored.

Disease as an explanation must be ruled out. Mr. Rayner opened many whales, as I have said. It was an unpleasant dissection, but it revealed no symptoms either of illness or starvation. Mr. Rayner also sought in vain for an unborn calf. It is thought that the skull of the foetus resembles more closely the old species from which the whale evolved. Such a skull has naturally not

been subjected to the crushing and the changes caused by birth. These whales must have calved in their death agony; they were severely battered among the jagged rocks before they reached the beach.

It was suggested that a submarine earthquake or upheaval might have thrown the whales on shore. Such upheavals occur at intervals of years in South African waters, and at Walvis Bay they are so violent that a sulphurous mud island appears, only to return below the waves. But on all these occasions millions of fish have been destroyed and left reeking on the beaches. At Kommetjie, and again at Grotto, there were no signs of submarine disturbance, and no fish.

Dr. Leonard Gill inclined towards a "follow-my-leader" theory, though he stated frankly that science cannot even guess at a reasonable explanation. He recalled the method of catching pilot whales in the Orkney Islands. When a herd approached, the fishermen tried to drive one or two into a shallow bay. If they were successful, the whole herd followed. But that was not suicide; science would have to revise the whole

doctrine of the preservation of the species if a suicidal instinct even in the smallest insect could be proved. Animals on land or in the sea do not commit suicide, however foolish the manner of their death may seem.

One more mystery of the False Killers naturally arises. Why is it these whales, almost unknown a few years ago, have suddenly forced themselves into such prominence and become common the world over? Abnormal breeding may have something to do with it. Dr. Gill suggested that the stranding of the False Killer is no new thing, but that all strandings previous to 1927 may have occurred at places inaccessible to naturalists. Certainly it is possible to imagine these schools leaping madly on to the remote beaches of Tierra del Fuego, the unmapped coasts of Antarctica or the Gulf of Carpentaria. Yet the world is old, and the False Killers have been roving the oceans of the world long enough for their mad whim to have influenced them within sight of civilisation; if, indeed, they have always possessed this whim. No one knows. Whales once lived on land; the finner whale still

displays rudimentary knuckles and finger bones. So that if we say the false Killers were merely returning to the earth where their ancestors once wallowed, we may be as near the truth as any baffled marine biologist.

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CHAPTER 5

EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD

Of all the islands I have seen, one which a naturalist called the "eighth wonder of the world" remains among my happiest memories. Dassen Island is still an unknown wonder. It is austere compared with the tropic isles, but I can sail there again and again without making the bleak discovery that its fascination has dwindled.

You will find Dassen Island looking like a starfish on the chart, thirty-six miles north of Cape Town and five miles from the coast. It lies in the path of a mighty, freezing, ocean current that sweeps up from the Antarctic, and then runs close inshore for more than a thousand miles, all the way from the Cape to Angola. This icy stream robs the landward breezes of their

moisture so that the vapour turns into fog instead of rain. It controls the climate and makes a sandy desert of the west coast and the islands. But the great current also brings riches. It carries with it the life of the Antarctic - the whales and the penguins.

Dassen Island, through this current, is really an outpost of the Antarctic. South Polar explorers have stated that nowhere in high latitudes are penguins found in huge colonies such as those which flourish on Dassen. It is the chief breeding ground of the Blackfooted or Jackass penguin, and at times there are probably fifteen millions of them on the four square miles of Dassen Island. A wonder isle indeed, and not only for the naturalist. The tale of human beings on Dassen is full of strange episodes.

I had an air glimpse of Dassen as far back as 1919, from the window of a twin-engined wartime Handley-Page converted for passenger flying in South Africa. It looked like a white starfish that day, and in fact the old Portuguese navigators called it "Ilha Branca", because of the white covering of guano. In later years I sailed to

the island in small yachts, lying securely at anchor in House Bay while the south-easter whipped up the combers all the way southwards to the halfsubmerged blue mass of Table Mountain.

Even now there are old fishing skippers who speak of Dassen as d'Almeida's Island. Many an isle has been, named after a man, and the original d'Almeida was a young Portuguese naval officer serving in a gunboat which called at Table Bay about the middle of last century. He went down with typhoid and was left behind. During his convalescence he sailed with fishermen, landed on Dassen Island, and decided to make his home there.

Although the low-lying, windswept island is not, at first sight, inviting in appearance, d'Almeida had chosen wisely. Large deposits of guano awaited export, and there was always a ready sale for the penguin eggs. So d'Almeida built a house, married, and lived there all his life. His son inherited the bird sanctuary, but left after some years. The grandson, Antonio d'Almeida, first became a farmer, then a miner; but when the

post of headman on Dassen fell vacant, the authorities remembered Antonio and offered him the billet. Thus the third of the line returned to the island and re-established the dynasty. He is a goodhumoured giant of a man with the dark hair and olive skin of the Portuguese, but a South African in speech. I could not have found a finer guide to the island and the birds. Among the fowls and sheep round his house I noticed two tame baboons. "My grandfather kept a zoo on the island," explained d'Almeida. "He had many different varieties of buck, and made a study of the smaller South African animals."

Antonio d'Almeida can answer any question about the penguins. There are six colonies of them on the island, and each penguin uses the same burrow year after year. This has been tested and proved by "ringing" experiments. The sandy areas of the island are honeycombed with burrows; elsewhere, any shelter is better than none, and penguins are to be found wherever there is a fragment of whalebone or wreckage or an overhanging rock. Burrows are usually lined



Penguins on Dassen Island, chief breeding ground of the jackass penguin, and from the naturalist's point of view the "eighth wonder of the world".

with seaweed and grass, but some tough penguins use pebbles. Paths from the burrows to the sea were welldefined. Indeed, the penguins have been in possession of Dassen for so long that even the rocks have been worn away by the tracks of millions upon millions of penguin feet.

There is no more approachable bird than the penguin, but I would not advise anything more familiar than an approach. Extend a coaxing hand, or let your foot slip into a burrow by mistake, and you may receive a vindictive jab from a beak as sharp as a pick. If you wish to lift a penguin, first watch d'Almeida. The technique is similar to that used with snakes. Put your foot deliberately on the penguin's neck, then seize it before the beak can be turned against you.

A penguin is more like a boat than a bird, and it makes astounding voyages. When the wanderlust calls the Dassen Island penguins and they depart on their mysterious migrations, they range all over the Southern Ocean. The fat little creatures you see on the island beaches, looking like peevish, clumsy old clubmen, have flippers that propel them at the rate of a hundred miles a

day in deep water. They have seen the fjords of far Kerguelen, the iceclad mountains of South Georgia and the cliffs of the Madagascar coast. But they always turn back before reaching the equator. North of the line you will find penguins only in zoos.

Sometimes a rare Rockhopper penguin waddles on shore at Dassen. It is smaller than the Jackass, and you can tell it at a glance by the yellow plumes on its crested head. The nearest Rockhopper breeding ground is the Tristan da Cunha group. Jackass penguins, by the way, take their name from their own braying sounds; it is like listening to an enormous herd of donkeys. At long intervals an albino penguin is found among the black-and-white millions. Such an oddity leads a desperate life, for penguins are intolerant birds and they peck the albino, strike it with their flippers and pursue it in the water.

Prowling among the grey, furry young penguins on Dassen you will see the Sacred Ibis, a sinister bird from Egypt. The ibis not only steals eggs but plunges its long beak into tasty chicks. It is a distant relation of the stork.

Coloured labourers on the island call them "chimney sweepers" because of their naked black heads and necks. In flight they are more attractive, for the white wing feathers are tipped with green. The ibis pest is a serious problem; they nest among the other birds and if you attack one, all are disturbed.

The penguin has other enemies. There is the southern blackbacked gull, a determined robber; and young penguins, not yet at home in the water, find the long arm of the octopus reaching out for them. Man-eating sharks are common off Dassen Island. If you see a pathetic onelegged penguin using a flipper as a crutch, you may be sure there has been an escape from a shark.

Although the penguins dominate the Dassen stage, there is a wealth of other bird life for those who seek it. On the island may be seen the largest and smallest of all the web-footed birds - the famous wandering albatross with wingspan up to seventeen feet; and the tiny black Mother Carey's Chickens with their white rumps. Both are petrels and lovers of the open sea. The albatross shuns the mainland and does not often

visit Dassen. Those observed on the island had doubtless flown without effort all the way from their breeding place on uninhabited Gough Island, south of Tristan da Cunha. Mollyhawks, the small albatrosses, also visit Dassen. The Cape fishermen often catch them on hooks for food, and call them "see kalkoen" (sea turkey). Then there are the terns, known on this coast as "mutton birds", laying their eggs on the bare ground without a semblance of a nest. The plovers are more careful; they hide their eggs under the sand. Another wading bird from the northern hemisphere which winters on Dassen is the curlew. You will also find oystercatchers, wagtails and larks among the penguins.

Cormorants inhabit the outer rocks of Dassen Island in vast numbers. This voracious fisheater is known in South Africa as the duiker (diver), and there are four kinds - the trekduiker, bank-duiker, the small, darkbrown reedduiker and the whitebreasted duiker. Trekduikers are by far the most common, and you have only to see them on the wing to realise that they have been well-named. Strung out low over the water, they go

past in cavalcades which cannot be counted but which must run into millions. They pass Dassen in "treks" several miles in length with hardly a gap between each formation. Unlike the penguins, they fish in organised flights, driving the shoals into shallow water and devouring them. Each duiker, it is estimated, eats its own weight in fish every day.

Duikers and penguins have one taste in common - they prefer the soft fish, and catch those with scales only when other varieties are scarce. A gluttonous duiker trying to swallow a fish too large for its throat is one of the alarming spectacles of Dassen Island. On a rock, with wings extended, the duiker becomes an heraldic emblem. They are all comparatively tame when nesting, but at other times they fly off as one approaches.

Finally there is the gannet ("malgas" in South Africa), a handsome bird which nests on other islands and comes to Dassen only for the fishing. A gannet in search of food gives a sensational display. Flying at two hundred feet, it will suddenly take aim and then fall headlong, with

folded wings, upon its victim. This gannet is almost identical with the British solan goose except for the tail feathers. It receives full protection as a valuable guano bird; but the fishermen catch them illicitly by trailing bait on a board painted the colour of the sea. The terrific impact kills the gannet.

Dassen had several names in early days. Joris van Spilbergen, the Dutch seaman, seems to have been the first man to report the island. He was there in November, 1601, with three ships bound for the Indies; and he called it Elizabeth Island. It seems probable, however, that the French were ahead of him. Spilbergen left it on record that he found a grave with a cross and some bottles, apparently of French make, on the island. He salted penguins and conies for ship's provisions and sailed away.

Four years after Spilbergen's visit the first English ships touched there, the Tiger and the Tiger's Whelp, and General Sir Edward Michelburne of the English East India Company went on shore with several companions. A storm drove the ships off, and the visitors had to wait

on the island, with their upturned skiff as shelter, for two days and nights. "Upon the said island is abundance of great conies and seals, whereupon we called it Cony Island," wrote Michelburne.

Now the coney of the Bible, which is what Michelburne certainly saw, is known in South Africa as the dassie or rockrabbit. (Both names are incorrect, as the dassie is not a rodent, but a small relative of the elephant.) Here arises a little mystery of Dassen Island which I have never been able to solve. Van Riebeeck, the first Dutch Governor of the Cape, sent many sealing expeditions to the island; and these men named it Dassen because of the numbers of dassies they observed. ("Das", in Nederlands and Afrikaans, means coney; "dassie" is the diminutive form and "dassen" the Nederlands plural.) The men killed a number of dassies for food, and declared they had never eaten more delicious meat. So there is no doubt about it - the island was once populated with dassies, which have now entirely disappeared. I shall return to this mystery later.

Van Riebeeck ordered the first settlement of Dassen Island in 1654, for it seems that he feared

intruders. Jan Woutersen was the leader of the party, and he was warned that he must appoint a successor if he "took ill, became melancholy or died." The thoughtful Van Riebeeck also sent a Hottentot beachcomber to the island to learn Dutch, so that he could accompany trading expeditions into the interior as interpreter. This man often appeared in later records; he was Klaas Das, probably named after the island.

The men on Dassen Island built a loopholed stone battery with two cannons and a stone house. A well yielded good fresh water. Vegetables were planted, and aided by the rich guano, the settlers soon had a flourishing garden. Four free burghers, who had bought a large boat called the Penguin from the Company, became coast traders and carried the produce of the island to Table Bay - sealskins, seal oil, dried seals' flesh and penguin eggs. Later in the century the Company had five hundred sheep grazing there. The island was also used as a place of banishment for a burgher's wife found guilty of "slandering an honest woman". Her term of exile, however, was only six weeks.

There is a long gap in the records of Dassen Island during the eighteenth century, but it is clear that men were stationed there from time to time to prevent foreign poachers from raiding the seals. The first recorded shipwreck occurred in 1801, when six men from a cutter owned by Tielman and Roos lived as castaways for twenty-six days. An account of their adventure states that they ate "rabbits and penguin eggs". Please remember the rabbits.

The next wreck was more dramatic, and a lively description of it was given by Mary Molesworth, daughter of MajorGeneral Arthur Molesworth of the Madras Army, in a letter to her father. I was fortunate in discovering a copy of this letter in Cape Town. Miss Molesworth left England in the ship *Lady Holland* late in 1829, bound for India. She describes the commander as a very disagreeable man. "You may form some idea of his character when I tell you that in consequence of some slight misunderstanding between him and a young officer at the cuddy table he threw two full

bottles of wine at the gentleman's head, and nearly killed him."

One night in February, 1830, the ship was beating against the south-easter, trying to make the Cape, when the passengers heard the unpopular captain shouting: "Helm hard down! Breakers ahead!" The ship struck at seven knots and lay rolling on a rock. The captain lost all authority. Seamen plundered the spirit store. Amid this confusion Mary Molesworth went to her cabin and saved her watch and a few trinkets. One passenger put guns in the boats for fear of landing among savages. There was a heavy surf running, but some of the seamen had remained sober enough to launch the longboat. The women were put out of a porthole, helped along the side of the ship to the stern, and lowered by a rope into the boat. In this way Mary Molesworth with thirteen other women passengers landed on Dassen Island.

She was taken to a hut which she describes as a "Robinson Crusoe abode, constructed of bones of whales and covered in with turf. There was a little lamp burning on one side, which threw a

dim light on us as we crept in and made us appear more ghastly than our fright had already done. The walls were made of halfdried seal and rabbitskins, which, with the bad oil in the lamp can easily be fancied not to emit a very refreshing smell. Fishing tackle, tobacco pouches and an old torn garment took up one corner, another was occupied by a rude image of the Virgin Mary. It only contained ten persons in a sitting position."

At daybreak Mary Molesworth walked out and found the island "covered with hares and penguins". (First, conies, you remember, then rabbits and now hares.) Winifred, a blue greyhound, had swum ashore from the wreck; and Mary Molesworth records that the greyhound caught seven hares, which they ate with rice and onions. They also boiled a ham on a fire of seaweed. The ship had carried three hundred pipes of Madeira. One came ashore. "This was a great comfort to the gentlemen and sailors in their toils."

The castaways found the island littered with large shellfish, which they used as drinking

vessels and spoons. The hares, they noted, fed on ferns. The three men on the island were not permanent inhabitants; they were there for a few months collecting penguin eggs. Not one life had been lost in the wreck, and, as the hut was overcrowded, some of the ship's company threw sails over a whalebone and slept in this tent. Mary Molesworth found the island climate an ordeal. "Our faces and hands were without any skin on them, our eyes red and inflamed with the white sand of the island, and our feet were so swollen and blistered that it was with difficulty we could walk ... Our captain was a quiet, unobtrusive spectator of the whole, pitied and despised by most of us."

Meanwhile the ship's doctor and the second mate had rowed to the mainland for help. The doctor, aided by a Saldanha Nay farmer, had gone to Cape Town on horseback with the news; and Sir Lowry Cole, the Governor, sent H.M.S. Falcon immediately to pick up the castaways. Within a week of the shipwreck Mary Molesworth's troubles were over.

You will have observed, of course, how Mary Molesworth has complicated the mystery I am still trying to solve. I put all the facts in front of Antonio d'Almeida recently, and left him puzzling over it. In his grandfather's day, he told me, there were hordes of rats which must have come from a wreck. His father imported cats to kill the rats; and years afterwards the cats which had run wild became a nuisance.

Antonio d'Almeida took white rabbits to the island. Some escaped from the hutches, and their descendants are still living in penguin burrows. But the dassies? Antonio said there were many dassie colonies on the mainland opposite Dassen, and so it is reasonable to believe that there were dassies on the island centuries ago. But he had never seen one there, and his father and grandfather had never mentioned dassies. For the moment I must admit defeat. I found tortoises on Dassen ... but no answer to the riddle of the dassies.

Penguins are easily irritated, and there have been long periods when the numbers of birds on Dassen Island have dwindled. Some years ago

fishermen off Marcus Island, one of the group to the north of Dassen, made a habit of catching penguins and using them as bait. Forthwith the outraged survivors deserted the island, and the whole revenue from eggs and guano was lost. When the lighthouse was being built on Dassen Island in 1893, the penguins and ducks resented the invasion of their stronghold by workmen, and for a long time they would not settle down. For many years it has been necessary to obtain a permit to visit any South African guano island; the birds are so valuable to the State that no risks can be taken. All the islands are guarded by headmen. Some naturalists believe that the periodical dwindling in the numbers of birds is due to the balance of nature being upset; the birds increase to such an extent that they cannot obtain enough fish. Then a certain number of birds die, and the balance is restored. The penguin, of course, is seriously affected by any shortage of fish, as it has to swim in search of food and has only a limited range during the breeding season. Hungry, and harried by fishermen in search of bait, the penguin has no

chance of settling down comfortably in a burrow on Dassen Island.

The eggcollecting season in normal years begins in February and lasts until the end of June. One private contractor organised the work for more than twenty-five years, paying the Government a "royalty" on each egg collected. The collectors robbed the burrows systematically in such a way that a puzzled penguin Would lay as many as twenty eggs in the course of five months instead of the normal clutch of two. It is the second egg that the labourer removes with his long wooden staff, and thus the penguin lays continually to bring the family up to the number demanded by instinct. Some parts of the island are always left untouched, and there the birds hatch out their eggs freely.

For three years, from 1933 to 1935, egg-collecting on Dassen had to be suspended owing to the disappearance of vast numbers of penguins. At this period diamonds were being flown down the coast regularly from the Orange River mouth to Cape Town; and it was suspected that the aircraft had made the birds

restless. But the mystery has never been solved. South Africa had to go without penguin eggs again in 1945, although aircraft had been warned to keep away from the island.

In Mary Molesworth's day, the eggs were regarded as suitable food for the slaves of Cape Town. Since then, the penguin egg has acquired a higher status, and pictures in many lands will testify that the huge, rich eggs - with light green jelly and yellow yolk - deserve to rank among the world's delicacies. 'The taste must be acquired. If you possess it, then a boiled penguin egg chopped up with butter and sprinkled with pepper is a feast indeed. Gourmets say they are as good as plovers' eggs. Others dislike the fishy flavour, and cannot be tempted. Nevertheless, the penguin egg, boiled, curried, scrambled, fried or served cold with salad is a noble dish; fit not only for the shipwrecked sailor, but for the restaurant. Several attempts have been made to find export markets in London and New York. On one memorable night in 1936, penguin eggs appeared on the menus of a hundred restaurants in the West End of London. Once the charm of

novelty had worn off, however, the demand ceased. In wartime, perhaps, it might have been a different story.

South Africa remains faithful to this odd delicacy, and cases are railed to every corner of the Union and Rhodesia. In the slave days they fetched a penny each. At the end of last century the price had risen to twopence, and for a number of years between the great wars a penguinegg cost fourpence. Now the Union Government has undertaken the collection, and the last box of two dozen I bought cost ten shillings. No doubt the price will rise again - but I must have my penguin eggs in season. Each egg, by the way, is two-and-a-half times the size of a hen's egg. They contain phosphorous, and are highly prized as a nerve tonic; whether the belief has any foundation I cannot say. One of the penguin egg's peculiarities is that it must be boiled for at least twenty minutes.

The export of penguins has been more successful than the egg ventures. Zoos in many parts of the world have been supplied with Dassen Island penguins. Special arrangements

had to be made for each batch, and an attendant, wise in the ways of penguins, travelled with them.

I watched one consignment going on board a mailship in Table Bay Docks between the wars. For days they had been fed on lumps of fish to accustom them to a diet which they obviously found distasteful after catching their own fish alive. A large canvas bath had been rigged for them on the foredeck; and the attendant sat on the edge feeding each bird, almost forcibly, in turn. Nevertheless, the Jackass penguin is a fairly good traveller. Attempts have been made to breed the majestic King Penguins from the Antarctic in captivity; but I believe that Edinburgh was the only Zoo in Europe where chicks were hatched and reared successfully. A King Penguin is probably worth £100 in a European zoo today.

As for the Emperor Penguin, standing four feet in height - that is a noble specimen which never survives a sea voyage. Penguins from Dassen are easy to handle compared with the giants of their species.

Dassen Island has only one manmade track - a rough route which runs from the beach to the lighthouse, through the penguin colonies. I was astonished to see a crazy skeleton of a motorcar using this track, carrying stores from the landing place for a mile across the island. It was a sort of heirloom, passed on down the years from keeper to keeper, and maintained in running order with the aid of lighthouse spares. After a record life it was replaced by a modern motorlorry.

One of the island headmen occupied his time during the slack season by building a motor-cutter. In six months he had completed a seaworthy craft, thirty-eight feet long, and capable of cruising anywhere along the South African coast. That is as satisfying a way of passing the time on a lonely island as any I can imagine.

One night I followed the keeper into the dark heights of the Dassen light until we reached the lamp room 150 feet from the ground. "The whole tower shivers in a gale," said the keeper. It was bright, but not dazzling, in the lamp room, for the lamp that sends out the long flash is small.

The immense lens revolving round the flame gives the brilliance. A weight, running down the centre of the lighthouse, turns the lens on its bath of mercury - simple, reliable clockwork which the keeper must wind up every two hours.

"You see that a lighthouse man's life is not so easy as it might appear," pointed out the keeper. "We have just finished painting the tower outside - a dizzy job. The lens weighs several tons. That means elbow grease when you have to clean it. There is always paintwork up here to be scrubbed, brass to be polished, lamps to be cleaned, weather records to be kept. We have to think of the airmen, too, nowadays, and note the sky conditions, clouds and wind speeds. There is a wireless station on the island and the keepers are the operators. Nothing new in that; we had wireless telegraph sets in some of our lighthouses in 1914, and seven years later the first wireless telephone sets were installed. Before that, we sent urgent messages from Dassen by pigeon post."

In the daytime I noticed curtains drawn round the glass of the lamp room. Without this

precaution the oil of the lamps and clockwork would be set on fire by the intense concentration of the sun's rays inwards through the glass. Curtains are sometimes set alight, and the keepers have always to be on guard against fire. (One man in a French lighthouse was attending to the lamp when the kitchen fire below set the room ablaze. Cut off by the smokefilled staircase, he descended outside with the aid of a rope and put the fire out.)

At all the remote lighthouses, stores sufficient for three months must be kept, for heavy weather has sometimes prevented the tugs from landing fresh supplies on the usual mail days. A large stock of *paraffin* is necessary - one large cylinder is consumed in two nights at the Dassen light.

Lighthouse men, you find, are often the sons of lighthouse men. They have been brought up in the tradition, and see no hardship in their isolation. Working without supervision, a strong sense of duty carries them through their seven day week. No keeper has ever been found drunk at his post. They are seldom troubled by the fact

that they cannot call in the doctor save in a real emergency. Only when their children have to leave them to attend school far away is there a tinge of sadness.

Contrary to popular belief and fiction, the keepers of the lights live in harmony and do not tire of seeing the same faces every day. This is proved by the fact that there is never a lack of volunteers for lonely lights such as Dassen Island. No "Grand Guignol" drama disturbs the calm routine of the South African coast lights. "At the end of a spell of leave in town I am always glad to go back," a keeper once told me. "When I win the big sweepstake I shall build a lighthouse of my own, and live there, and turn on the light when I feel like it."

A film producer once applied to the Union Government for permission to use Dassen Island as the "location" for an island drama. He failed, for although a lone cameraman can always secure a permit to film the birds, the presence of a whole company might have caused a disturbance. Nothing daunted, the producer borrowed fifty penguins from a zoo, and had

thousands of cardboard penguins printed. The picture was made on one of the Canary Islands, with the living penguins giving animation to the beach scene. I believe it looked convincing enough on the screen, but the shrewd penguin could not have been deceived for a moment.

Though Dassen Island is often shrouded in fog, and ships have been lost on the reefs offshore, no foghorn has been installed. The precious penguins might not like it ! The island is usually the first landfall made by steamers bound from England to the Cape; and several have met the same fate as Mary Molesworth's ship. I once met an old sailor who was shipwrecked on Dassen in the S.S. Wallarah in 1891. He was an able seaman named Beamish who preferred sailing ships; but he was persuaded to join the Wallarah on her maiden voyage. Inexplicably the Wallarah struck Dassen Island on a calm clear night.

"We jettisoned tons of cargo - clothing, boots, pianos, rum, whisky and jars of mercury," Beamish told me. "The pianos were in airtight cases, and for weeks afterwards the farmers on

the Cape west coast were salvaging pianos. Four tugs came to help us, but in the end we had to abandon the Wallarah, hard and fast on the rocks of Boom Point, the northern arm of the island." I met this old seaman in 1933, just after he had made a sentimental pilgrimage to the scene of the wreck. The storms of forty-two years had destroyed all traces of the Wallarah.

Dassen Island once saw the most profitable salvage enterprise ever carried out in Cape waters. In 1916 the 7,000-ton freighter Ping Suey was on a voyage from England to the Far East. She was keeping fairly close to the shore to avoid German raiders; and while making for Table Bay she entered a dense fog bank. The Ping Suey fetched up on a sloping ledge of rocks in House Bay, close to d'Almeida's quarters. I saw her there, and she looked like a vessel lying at anchor in the bay. This little anchorage, however, is only safe for fishing boats and small yachts - and then only when the wind is not coming out of the north. Miraculously the Ping Suey had missed all the outlying rocks and reefs, but her position remained extremely dangerous.

Tugs failed to move her. Despairing of salving the ship, the agents concentrated on the cargo. When everything had been discharged into lighters the Ping Suey was still found to be hard and fast. She lay there for eight months, abandoned and becoming a mere rusty roost for the sea-birds. Then a Cape Town firm offered £6,000 for the ship, and this was accepted. The firm engaged two clever salvage engineers who believed they could refloat the Ping Suey. A small fleet assembled while the engineers, using compressed air, pumped the engine room dry. Cables were rigged to an off lying reef nearly half a mile away. These preparations cost £60,000, and at any moment during the three months of toil a gale from the northwest would have destroyed the ship. In the end, however, the great risks that had been taken were justified; for the Ping Suey came off into deep water with the aid of her own winches.

She was towed to Table Bay Docks, and the salvage men packed a thousand tons of cement into her bilges to strengthen the torn bottom-plates. Thus fortified, the Ping Suey steamed

away to the Far East for permanent repairs. She carried a valuable wartime freight of wool and scrapiron, The Ping Suey was then twenty years old, but ship and cargo were sold for more than £300,000. In 1932 the old Ping Suey, named Attualita and Italianowned, was sold for £2,500. The salvage men who made a small fortune out of the job never forgot the narrow margin by which they had triumphed. Two days after the Ping Suey had left Dassen Island, a violent gale blew up from the north-west.

One day while the Ping Suey was aground on Dassen, a dead whale was washed ashore. The head was missing. No one thought much about it at the time; but soon afterwards ships were lost off the Cape by striking mines, and the mystery was explained. A pity the obvious clue was not followed up immediately. That was Dassen's only contact with the 1914-18 war. This time, too, a deep peace rested over the island, broken only once when the lighthousekeepers sighted and reported a threefunnelled ship off their shore. She was a German minelayer, but this

time the minesweepers of the South African Naval Forces cleared the seas.

Dassen Island's population seldom falls below a dozen, and during the eggcollecting season there may be a hundred men hard at work. It has never been difficult to recruit labour for the island. All sorts of people fall under the spell of islands, and the queue waiting for jobs usually holds six men for every vacancy.

At one time the labourers were white men of all nationalities, mainly seamen, but with a sprinkling of odd customers. Many a well-educated Englishman put in months of toil on Dassen last century; sweating out the liquor and saving the meagre reward for the payday in Cape Town when all would be squandered all too soon. It was not uncommon to find a broken-down doctor in those old guano gangs - a man who never revealed his skill until some emergency made him remember the Hippocratic oath.

For forty years the egggatherers have been Cape coloured men. Perhaps it was inevitable that there should have been tragic incidents

among men isolated in this way. From time to time men suffering from monotony or hard treatment have escaped in small boats, and some have been drowned in the breakers on reaching the mainland. The final scandal was exposed in 1932, when deaths occurred on the island as a result of floggings. There were criminal proceedings and the grim affair was debated in Parliament. As a result the whole system was reorganised. I do not think Dassen Island will again become the scene of sadism.

The fresh penguin eggs are brought to Cape Town almost every other day throughout the season in fishing cutters and other small craft. I knew a tough old seafarer named Charles Broker who secured a contract to carry penguin eggs some years ago. He had bought an aged but seaworthy Admiralty pinnace, which he named Theodora. She was forty-seven feet in length, but very narrowguttled. Broker installed a cranky motor, fitted up a cabin, and lived on board. In this pinnace he made some of the most remarkable voyages ever attempted along the stormy South African coast. Once he sailed from

Table Bay to Angola and back. Again and again he was reported missing. Even when he was on the short Dassen Island run he managed to become six days overdue. But those who knew Broker and the Theodora were never alarmed. If he did not arrive it simply meant that his motor had failed again, and that he was beating back under sail. A doubleskin teak pinnacle, coppered, is not easily lost.

Until war brought crash boats into Cape waters, the record for the run from Table Bay to Dassen was held by a harbour tug - two and three-quarter hours. Now I suppose the time might be measured in minutes, but I do not want to race to Dassen that way. The island is always linked in my mind with small yachts and old shipmates. Yachts running free before a fresh sou'-wester, with the logline trailing out astern and an odour of pea soup coming from the galley. I like to prick off the distance to Dassen on my own chart and read the island names. Waterloo Bay, Boom Point, Spout Rock that throws up the sea like a depth charge, The Triangles and noisy Roaring Sister ... these are

names round the penguin isle, and for me they bring pleasant memories of old cruises. In a changing world I can at least be sure that when I sail to Dassen again the birds and the beaches will be as they were when Spilbergen stepped on shore and gaped at the penguin millions.

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CHAPTER 6

SALDANHA MEMORIES

Thousands of men in this war saw Saldanha Bay from the decks of troopships. For many of them it was their only glimpse of South-Africa - just that huge, almost landlocked bay, the scavenging seabirds, a fishing village in the northern arm, nothing to linger in the memories of seawearied soldiers after a long passage. Men in the convoys which assembled there must have steamed on to the Middle East with bleak impressions of Saldanha.

Saldanha has seen something of all the wars for more than three centuries. It still has a lonely, undeveloped look about it, though the bay is

only a hundred miles by road from Cape Town. You can sail there from Table Bay by daylight in a small yacht, as I have often done, and enter the bay almost like an old Portuguese navigator, like Antonio da Saldanha himself, without finding any unpleasant signs of civilisation. Every year I go out with a shotgun on the farms round the bay and lagoon to hunt steenbok and duiker, pheasant, partridge and guinea fowl. In those waters I caught a skate as large as my dinghy. Once I watched a treasure syndicate diving for sunken gold. I have known the place for thirty years, and I am still finding links with the adventurous past in this unknown South African harbour.

On the chart, Saldanha Bay appears as a large, roughly circular, bite out of the west coast of the Cape Province, with Schooner Rock marking the northern and Stomp Point the southern entrance. It is more than three miles wide, but there are three white bird islands in the fairway. Down at the southern end of the bay are two more islands; and there the shallow lagoon begins and stretches southwards for eight miles. The names

on the chart are as exciting as they should be; they recall many fine ships that sailed into the bay, and many stirring events. Where are the Bruydegom and the Salamander now - ships which have given their names to bays? They took green vegetables and eggs on board and steered out of our ken. Why was Tobacco Bay so called? No one could tell me. I only know that the place is now named Danger Bay and that the steamer Haddon Hall perished there.

From the hills near the entrance you can see Table Mountain more than sixty miles away. Round the bay are koppies heaped with grey boulders; grain lands and the bush where the buck survive; homesteads like tiny groups of white stones amid the delicate blues and pinks of evening. In the north corner of the bay you see the crawfish factory at Hoetjies Bay, the tin huts of the fishermen, and the Saldanha railway station, the end of the line from Cape Town. A white beach runs in a grand sweep, broken here and there by huge rocks, to Langebaan village on the south-eastern shore. Opposite Langebaan are the two whaling stations, with chimneys that

once smoked in the season, red slipways, black-painted whalers. The smell surrounding them was usually like roast beef, but sometimes it became nauseating.

Gold, ambergris and musk were the treasures sought by Van Riebeeck when he sent the little yacht Goede Hoop on a voyage of discovery to Saldanha Bay. In those spacious days the Governors aimed high. Ambergris, it is true, has since been found occasionally in sperm whales at the Saldanha whaling stations. But if Van Riebeeck had asked for a cargo of fish, guano and penguin eggs he would have been much nearer the mark.

Saldanha, of course, is one of the great centres of the fishing industry. Hundreds of men rely for their livelihood on good hauls of snoek, South Africa's national fish, named after the fresh water pike of Holland. A coloured fisherman can make £30 a week during the season; and he earns it. Nearly every man bears some scar telling of a false movement while hauling the powerful, fighting snoek on board.

Ramble along the wooden fish jetties of Saldanha in April when the boats come in heavy laden, and you see feverish activity. The women, even the children, are there to seize the fish, slap them down on low benches, and extract the entrails with deft knife thrusts. Then the snoek go into the brine tubs in rough buildings on the beach. When the salting process is over, sun and wind complete the cure. Fresh snoek are rushed away from Saldanha in motortrucks to villages far from the sea. Snoek fetched ten shillings apiece during the war, a scarcity value. No wonder the fishermen blood their hand lines eagerly and prepare the sharkskin bait long before the first shoals are sighted.

When the Saldanha fishermen are not out after snoek they are dropping their nets in the long kelp where crawfish swarm. In a good season between the wars, twenty million crawfish were caught along the Cape coast and most of them were canned or frozen and shipped to France. Saldanha is to have a government "crawfish farm", where crawfish eggs will be hatched in huge seawater tanks. The young

crawfish will be kept there until they are able to fend for themselves. Then they will be used for restocking coastal areas which have been depleted by overfishing.

Gold, ambergris and musk - guano, whale oil and wheat. Truly there are surprises for explorers. And yet there is money in Saldanha Bay, only a few fathoms down, in the chests of ships buried there under the sand. You need never sail as far as Cocos for a treasure hunt while Saldanha guards its old secrets.

Jutten Island, on the southern side of the Saldanha entrance, is a treasure island. I like to remember Jutten, with its two guanowhitened domes of rock, as I once saw it under a full Easter moon as I steered into the bay on a sailing cruise. It was a night when the ghosts of lost crews might have prowled over the little island and made their groans heard above the braying of the penguins.

Next day at Langebaan a man showed me a handful of coins. They had been washed on to the sandy beach of Jutten Island - coins from the Dutch East India Company's ship, Meresteyn,

wrecked there in April, 1702. Year after year the winter gales strike down to the broken hull of the Meresteyn and start a few more coins drifting slowly towards the shore. After two centuries the sea is giving up some of its treasure.

An historian told me that the Meresteyn probably carried little gold. Europe was then, as now, hungry for gold; and a vessel outward bound like the Meresteyn would have her moneychests filled with silver for trading in the East Indies.

Then I gave the coins to an expert collector to examine.

"At first glance I thought they were pieces of eight," he reported. "I find, however, that they are Spanish coins of approximately the same value, issued at the same period - ducatoons. These ducatoons were minted in Brussels, the chief town of the Spanish Netherlands. They bear the head of Philip IV, 'by the Grace of God King of Spain and the Indies'."

Few visitors land on Jutten Island. An official permit is necessary, and for weeks at a time landing is impossible owing to heavy weather.

But one or two rare visitors, knowing the story or the wreck, have wandered out to the beach on the southwest side of the island at low tide, and they have found coins. I am told that at long intervals, when the tide is at its lowest ebb, the very bones of the Meresteyn may still be seen, not far below the surface.

Though the oak timbers of the Meresteyn have been rotting 14 fathoms down for more than two centuries now, it is easy to imagine the scenes that ended in wreck and tragedy. It was a disaster brought about by foolhardy seamanship. A master who lost his ship in similar circumstances today would certainly have his certificate taken away - if he was not drowned, like the blundering captain of the Meresteyn.

Let us roll back the curtain then, and watch the Meresteyn, with her rich cargo and money chests, approaching the Cape after a long passage from Amsterdam. Land was sighted at noon on April 3, 1702 - the low coast of Saldanha. The Meresteyn stood in, a south-west breeze filling her sails, until night fell. Then the master made his first grave error of judgment.

He had forty sick men on board, and in his eagerness to come to an anchorage and secure fresh provisions he broke all the rules of wise navigation. Saldanha Bay was, evidently; to him, an unknown harbour; yet he decided to enter it at night, without the aid of landmarks or lights, "thinking that the moon would favour them."

But the moon, which favoured me last time I passed into Saldanha before daybreak, did not shine on the doomed men and women of the Meresteyn. "Breakers ahead!" called the second mate from the fo'c'cle head. It was the heavy south-west swell beating on the rocks of the south head of Saldanha, and the ship was lumbering along between this point and Jutten Island. Nowadays small steamers and fishing craft often use this narrow passage; but for a sailingship it was a dangerous position indeed, made more perilous by the ignorance of the captain.

"Luff!" cried the captain then. "Luff, and unfurl the hind sails!"

"In God's name, luff!" yelled the chief mate from the main rigging.

The ship swung slowly towards the wind. Even then she might have been saved, but for a further blunder. Thinking that the ship would not come round in time, the captain ordered the "daily anchor" to be let go. The anchor dragged, for the foresails were still drawing full. He then threw out the bower.

"Cut the cables!" shouted the quick-witted mate. "She'll come round." But this decision the nervous captain would not take on his own initiative. He called the officers together, wasting valuable time; and while the feverish consultation was in progress the ship drifted close to the south-west side of Jutten Island. This is the worst side, fringed with rocks. In a moment the Meresteyn was a wreck, "most miserably smashed among the breakers", as the record has it.

"It is a wonder that anyone was saved in such a heavy sea which wriggles itself through the high and smooth, sharp rocks, but ninety-eight men and a black woman survived," one of the Meresteyn's officers reported to the Company. Those who reached the island safely owed their

lives to their own efforts; they seized planks and spars and were mercifully washed on shore.

When the roll was called it was found that, besides the captain, two women who were bound for the Cape with their five children had perished; also the second mate, the bookkeeper and most of the men.

In the morning the survivors searched the beach "but could see neither men nor goods in consequence of the heavy surf". Later, floating planks, broken boxes, and one dead soldier were found, and the mast and yards of the wrecked ship drifted towards the shore.

Jutten Island is a desolate and waterless spot. It was not long before the survivors were hard at work making a raft with which to reach the company's station on the mainland. Soon all had been rescued, and reports of the wreck were sent to Governor William van der Stel at Cape Town.

The Governor and his councillors seemed far more concerned with prospects of salvage than with the loss of life. They immediately dispatched a vessel called the Wezel with

instructions "to save whatever of money or cargo may wash up, or be recovered".

Men were stationed on Jutten Island to carry out these orders, but they had little luck. Some lead (probably ballast), planks, casks of butter, brandy and oil were found - nothing more. "We do not believe that any of the money chests will ever be recovered, as the stern of the ship (containing the saloon where the money was stored) was the first to break, far outside against a rock in the heaviest part of the surf," stated the master of the Wezel. A later report was just as gloomy. "Regarding the recovery of the specie, we believe it to be impossible. The obstacles are the great and violent waves which come straight from the open sea. Whether it be windy or calm, the sea remains the same. The specie can likewise not be thrown up by the sea, as to all appearance there is a steep depth here."

This view was reluctantly accepted by the company at the time. Twenty-five years later, however, the Council of Seventeen in Holland heard of an English diver, John Lethbridge of Newton Abbot in Devon, who had invented an

outfit which enabled him to "creep about the ground, under water". Lethbridge demonstrated his apparatus in Holland, and the directors of the company gave him the task of recovering specie from the sunken Slot ter Hooge at the Portuguese island of Porto Santo. Lethbridge brought up treasure worth a quarter of a million sterling in silver bars and ducatoons. The company then sent Lethbridge to the Cape to try his luck in stormier waters. Lethbridge and his mates used a sort of cask with holes for the arms and legs. The cask was six feet high, with a diameter of thirty inches at the top and eighteen at the bottom. Iron hoops lent strength against water pressure. It had a cubic content of about thirty gallons. The diver climbed into the cask from above, adjusted the waterproof arm and leg devices, and then the top was bolted on. A glass window was provided. There was no air pump. Lethbridge, breathing the foul air in the cask, often remained on the bottom for thirty minutes at a stretch.

This weird outfit was probably the first diving dress ever to be used south of the equator, and the Meresteyn was among the first wrecks

Lethbridge tackled. He brought up a few silver coins before the work was interrupted by heavy weather.

When Lethbridge returned to Europe in 1728 he left two of his assistants at Saldanha. The exposed position of Jutten Island, however, kept them on the beach for weeks, and after recovering a few more seaworn coins they returned to attempt more profitable salvage in Table Bay.

And from that day to this there is no record of any further attempts to raise the Meresteyn's silver. For a modern diver the work would be simple. The charts show that the chests lie no deeper than 14 fathoms (84 feet), and probably much less at low water spring tides.

It would, of course, be necessary to obtain permission from the Government to search; and onethird of any treasure trove would be claimed by the Government. But there should still be ducatoons in plenty for the salvage syndicate.

Several attempts have been made to recover treasure from the sunken Dutch East India ship Middelburg in Saldanha Bay. I saw something of one of these efforts in August, 1935 - and the

anticlimax. The Middelburg, homeward bound from China, was surprised with five other Dutch ships at anchor in Saldanha Bay on July 21, 1781, by five British ships of the line under Captain Sir Thomas Pasley. The "battle" was brief. The Dutch ships loosed their topsails in a vain attempt to run ashore and thus avoid falling into the hands of the enemy. It was hopeless - the British had opened a raking fire which prevented the Dutch from weighing their anchors. The Dutch captains set their ships on fire and struck their colours.

Pasley immediately sent armed boats to put out the fires. The British seamen were successful on board five ships; but the sixth, the Middelburg, was a furnace. She sank just off the point which shelters the anchorage known as "The Hole", near Hoetjies Bay. The position of the wreck has always been wellknown, and at low tide I have had her timbers pointed out to me, less than six fathoms down.

Mr. A. M. Carroll, mentioned previously, made his first attempt on the Middelburg in 1905. The currents ran so fiercely round the

point that the diver could work only for a short period at the turn of each tide. Several relics in the shape of porcelain and old cannon were brought to the surface. Then the diver was attacked by an octopus. He escaped from the tentacles, came to the surface, and settled his terrible enemy with a charge of dynamite.

Soon after that encounter Mr. Carroll gave up the attempt. But in 1935 he was back again with an Italian diver, Rossi, equipped with the most modern dress. Rossi remained at work in spite of the current, and within a few days he had sent up a ton of metal heavily encrusted with marine growths. Some of the metal bars appeared to have been encased in wood packing. Hopes ran high. A fast car took samples to Cape Town, and I went to the analyst's laboratory to hear the verdict.

It was ballast - iron ballast. A friend of mine at Saldanha, owner of a fishing cutter, is using the eighteenth century ballast from the Middelburg to this day. "For sentimental reasons," he says.

Between Langebaan and the whaling stations, two uninhabited islands lie at the entrance to the lagoon. Meeuw and Schapen are the islands. They have their own stories - every bay and rock and berg at Saldanha has some glamour of old adventure.

Timeworn V.O.C. coins, the mark of the Dutch East India Company, have been found on Meeuw Island. From Schapen island a valuable heap of 2,700 sealskins was removed by Van Riebeeck's men - skins left there by a French ship when her holds were full. Seals are taken for their pelts on the Saldanha islets to this day. The first white settlement at Saldanha was built of the ribs of whales covered with sealskins.

It was on Meeuw Island, about a century ago, that a secret spring of fresh water was unearthed. The fountain had been sealed up by masonry and cement, and the water carried by a channel to the sea, eleven feet below high water mark. This secret spring was probably a relic of the period when the French visited the bay and tried to secure ownership. Again and again the Royal Arms of France were raised on standards, only to

be knocked down by rhinos, burnt by Hottentots, or torn down and replaced by the insignia of the Dutch Company. Some of the early stone beacons set up by these rivals still stand.

The lagoon is worth exploring. I took as my pilot a fisherman who knew every corner of it, the origin of every place name, the legends of the old fishing villages. Come aboard the launch then, and steer down the main channel. The width of the lagoon varies from one to two miles, and there are many sandbanks to avoid. But our pilot will take us safely to Geelbek with several feet of water under our keel.

We pass many open boats with fishermen casting their nets; there are, in fact, over 70 boats fishing in the lagoon. Here is a bed of redbait, where galjoen are to be caught; there is a stretch of black mussels looming up through the clear green waters. Ahead lies an area of sea grass - food which the harders love. They say that the harder "bokkums", fish salted and dried in sun and wind, made by the lagoon people, are the tastiest of all.

The fishermen have their own marks and their own names for their favourite fishing grounds-Grootbos, Zonnewijzer, Mooimaak, Witgat - you will not find them on the chart. The best place in the lagoon is the aptlynamed Goudmyn, a sluit where fish are always to be found.

Down the lagoon on the Langebaan side there is a fine old house on a fertile estate called Oesterval. The house, with its courtyard and garden, was used by that sporting old Governor of the Cape, Lord Charles Somerset, early last century, as a shootingbox. In his day the shooting must have been superb. Even now you cannot walk inland through the low bush without putting up a buck.

I used to visit Oesterval to see Captain Christian King, a retired mariner who lived there for some years. Captain King's last command was a strange vessel called the Penguin, which plied between the whaling stations and Oesterval carrying fresh water from the Oesterval spring. The Penguin was a composite ship, a triumph of improvisation. A boiler and machinery had been placed in an old barge. The funnel, engineroom

skylight and other fittings had been taken from old whalers. She was suitable only for work in a calm lagoon, but Captain King had parted from her sadly. For many years after the Penguin had been scrapped she served as a jetty at Langebaan. Captain King was a great model-ship builder, and he had put a couple of hundred sailing ships into bottles. But I never saw the Penguin in his collection at Oesterval. Perhaps her peculiar lines did not lend themselves to the art of the modeller.

Not far from Oesterval you can see a dredger at work with huge grabs, bringing up oyster shell from an enormous bed on the floor of the lagoon. The oysters died thousands of years ago - scientists have never been able to discover the reason - and the shell became fossilised. Years of work have merely picked a small hole in the bed. There is only one other oyster shell deposit in the world like it, and that is at Chesapeake Bay. The Langebaan lagoon shell is pounded into "chicken grit" for poultry farmers, or burnt to procure lime.

I know a man who lived for years in a small sailing yacht on this lagoon. He had built the boat himself on the lines of the famous little yawl Islander, in which Harry Pidgeon sailed twice round the world alone. In peacetime he kept the boat in Table Bay; and he intended to sail in Pidgeon's tracks one day. The 1939-45 War interfered with his plans, and when he was rejected for war service he decided to take the boat up to Saldanha and pass the time until all restrictions were swept away.

He had a canoe which he used to paddle across to Oesterval to buy fresh vegetables. Parcels of books reached him regularly from a public library. For exercise, he walked on the lone beach that stretches southwards from Saldanha to Yzerfontein. Once he discovered a ship's lifeboat, fully equipped but without a crew, washed up by the sea. He passed many days in complete solitude. As he had no wireless receiver on board the yacht, he lost touch with the war news for long periods; but he did not regard this as a hardship.

When I met him again at Langebaan in 1943 he had just decided to try his luck again with the medical examination. This time he was successful, and he spent the rest of the war in the South African Naval Forces - a contrast with his life as a hermit on the calm lagoon.

To the naturalist, the lagoon is a delight. We pass a solitary seat, then a gorgeous company of pink flamingo's, while clouds of birds fly over the water ahead: They used to hunt the flamingo on the lagoon years ago; now, rightly, they are protected.

The launch approaches a narrow passage between the islands near Geelbek at the head of the lagoon. Herons stare at us from the reeds. The water shallows rapidly, down goes the anchor, and we clamber into the dinghy to reach the shore.

The farm Geelbek, built in 1860, was modernised and turned into a pleasaunce by the late Mr. H. de V. Steytler. It is one of the many Cape farms to which I should like to retire - a white fronted homestead with beautiful gables, lawns, palms, fruit and vegetable gardens,

poultry runs, a wharf with bathing boxes, electric light. Many famous racehorses were once bred at Geelbek. The homestead was furnished with rare discrimination, as those who bought the carpets at the sale will agree. The cellar field marvellous vintages. Some of the wines passed to Langebaan, and I was able to purchase the very last bottle of Perrier Juuet 1919 during one visit. That was a champagne to remember.

But I have wandered away from the lagoon. The launch is under way again, our meal of beer and sandwiches over. Now we are landing at the pretty village of thatched cottages named after a seventeenth century explorer - Schryver's Hoek. Further on lies Church Haven, with its redroofed church and school. A healthy smell greeted us, for the fishermen were tarring their seines. During the whaling season the hard-working folk of the village find employment at the whaling stations.

The next port of call is historic Oude Post. Today the place is a farm with grain and goats as the most prominent features. But in the very early days of the Cape the Dutch East India

Company soldiers were stationed there. Near the main farm building the remains of the fort they built can still be seen as a circular stone outcrop just above the ground.

Old graves, some of them of soldiers, marked by heaps of stones, are on the hillside above Oude Post. Ancient cannon balls and bullets are picked up by the goatherds. On the summit of Constable Hill there is a cannon hauled there in the seventeenth century to defend the bay against the French.

Oude Post was the Company's first station in Saldanha Bay; but there is another explanation of the name. Letters were once posted there under a stone similar to the Table Bay post office stones in the South African Museum. Deep water runs along the western shore of the lagoon as far as Oude Post so that vessels of fairly deep draught could sail up to collect the letters.

The sun is sinking over the whaling stations as the launch glides past the line of houses on Langebaan beach to her moorings. When I first knew Langebaan in 1916 it was a place easier to reach by sea than by land. There was no motor-

road; people travelled over a track in Cape carts and oxwagons. A modern hotel stands on Pofadder Point; and if there is a better view from any balcony in the whole Cape, I have still to see it.

Langebaan would rival Hermanus if the fishing were as good. For some reason, however, the fish in the lagoon can usually be taken only in nets. The line fishermen must seek their sport in the northern part of Saldanha Bay or the open sea.

So Langebaan is still essentially the holiday resort of the great wheatgrowing districts. The bay is a superb sailing ground of which Table Bay yachtsmen often think wistfully during the south-easter season; and at Easter a fleet of yachts sail northwards in the night to Saldanha. Few penetrate the lagoon; the time is short, and only auxiliary craft can hope to navigate the winding channels with ease.

Night falls, the moon track shimmers down the lagoon, and at Oude Post gleams a yellow light. Roll up the chart - our lagoon voyage is over.

There is a little corner of Norway on the shores of Saldanha Bay, formed by the whaling stations which I have already mentioned. They were built early in the century, around deep inlets which are not unlike Norwegian fjords. I met remarkable characters there in the days when the great brown blubber tanks were simmering merrily and the whale gunboats steamed in with their huge, inflated carcasses. I went out with the catchers and then stayed on at Donkergat whaling station, fascinated, for a week - just listening to the tales of these modern Vikings.

The jetty at Donkergat is an old wooden steamer, the Vale, which lumbered out from Norway at a solemn three knots, served for a time as a floating factory, and ended her days in this fashion - scuttled, with piles driven into the bottom to keep her in position. Close by is the tiny iron skeleton of the Neptune, the first steam whaler ever used in South African waters. She was no larger than a pinnacle, but she cruised out on her own keel. This is an old Norwegian custom - taking very small craft across the

oceans. Even the waterboat, a former Norwegian pilot cutter, came to Saldanha under her own sails. Some of the whale gunboats seemed very small for the voyages they had undertaken far into the Antarctic, summer after summer. I asked a gunner about it, and he replied: "A ship will stand more than a man has nerve to put her to." But to be truthful, if these whaling men have a fault it is that they sometimes risk too much.

Pirates careened their ships at Saldanha. Those quiet beaches were much to their liking after long and lawless cruises. But one inexperienced pirate, Captain George Dew, found himself in a corner there in 1693. Dew had been ordered by the Governor of the Bermudas to join the Royal African Company on the West Coast in an attack on the French establishment in the Gambia. He had a fast, sixteengun vessel called the Amy, and he decided to turn pirate. In the first encounter, the Amy had her main mast shot away and hull damaged. Dew ran for Saldanha to refit. He told the Dutch officials that he was bound for Madagascar to buy slaves.

The Dutch searched the Amy and in a secret compartment papers were found which revealed the Amy's real mission and Dew's piratical inclinations. Dew was sent to Holland to be dealt with by the Directors of the Dutch East India Company. His fate is not to be found in the Cape archives.

At one time Saldanha Bay nearly became an Irish settlement. It was in 1820, when shiploads of British settlers were arriving in the Eastern Province. Four Irish parties, led by William Parker, an exMayor of Cork, had been promised land; and some official, fearing trouble between the British and the Irish, directed Parker's section to the remote Saldanha Bay area.

Parker sent about 200 Irish men, women and children inland to the Clanwilliam district. He established himself at Saldanha, planned a city to be called "New Cork", and bought the two small islands off Langebaan. Parker was a controversial figure wherever he went. Nevertheless, he had summed up the possibilities of Saldanha, and set about raising money for his grandiloquent schemes.

"Saldanha will soon rise from the obscurity with which it has been tied since the first settlement of the Cape," predicted Parker in 1821. "The shipwrecks last January in Table Bay will bring it into note." Parker, however, quarrelled with Lord Charles Somerset, a dangerous adversary, and was ordered out of the country. Thus Saldanha never became "New Cork".

Weekend cruises from Table Bay to Saldanha were popular many years ago. South Africa's first coasting steamer, the paddlewheeler Hope of 194 tons, ran an excursion there as far back as December, 1838. Her engines enabled her to make the trip in daylight each way, and she carried 72 passengers at thirty shillings a head. Early this century the Bucknall coaster Balgowan revived the enterprise. The return fare was £3 7s. 6d., and passengers slept on shore at the Hoetjies Bay hotel.

Saldanha Bay was the first South African port of call of the Alabama. Her arrival there in July, 1863, created a great stir among the farmers. Captain Semmes and his officers went out

hunting; and one of them, killed in a shotgun accident, was buried on the farm. Later the Alabama sent her prizes, the Sea Bride and the Tuscaloosa, into Saldanha Bay.

Towards the end of last century many ships with smallpox on board arrived in Table Bay. They were ordered up to Saldanha to remain there in quarantine until cleared. Many a victim was buried on the shores of the bay. Often I have sailed past a cave just above highwater mark, known as "Doctor's Hole". In the cave, during one of the epidemics, a ship's surgeon afflicted with the disease went to die.

Boer commandoes under General Smuts reached Saldanha Bay during the last stages of the South African War. A liner, anchored far out in the bay, took the small British population on board. There followed a queer naval action. The men of the commandoes opened fire on the liner with their rifles. A British gunboat, which happened to be passing, responded to the liner's signals and steamed into the bay at full speed. She opened fire with her forward guns at a range of two miles and killed some cattle at the place

now known as Oorlog's Vlei. This incident has been described as the only naval action of the Boer War, but, in fact, a similar affair occurred further north at Lambert's Bay.

Saldanha is a graveyard of old ships, and every depression has added to the hulks in the shallows. Often I walked on the splintered decks of the old German liner *Präsident* after she had been stripped of every fitting that might possibly be sold. In nine months she was cut down to the waterline for scrap metal. The *Präsident*, in 1917, carried coal for the German raiding cruiser *Königsberg*. Both ships hid in the Rufiji delta; but natives reported the position of the *Präsident* and boats from H.M.S. *Chatham* captured her. In the charthouse, a German chart of the delta was found -- and with it a clue to the *Königsberg*. Shelled by the monitor *Severn*, the *Präsident* settled down on the bed of the river. After the armistice a South African salvage firm raised her at enormous expense and towed her to Saldanha Bay. I was told that she had cost nearly £100,000 by that time; but she was found to be useless, and the shipbreakers got her for a few hundreds.

Two other ships that lay for years in Saldanha Bay were the steel sailing ships Oberon and Sound of Jura. They were sisters, built within a few yards of each other at Glasgow during the 'nineties of the last century. After sailing the oceans for nearly forty years they ended their careers in the same corner of Saldanha Bay.

The islands of Saldanha possess riches very different from the Jutten Island treasure which I have described. Malagas Island was Madagascar Island in the Dutch East India days; but teeming thousands of South African gannet (locally known as malagas) have made their home there and given their name to the island. The seas sweep dangerously round Malagas. Landing is possible only by dinghy, and then the visitor has to wait his chance, leap across to a flat rock and climb on to the island before the next swell catches him.

Nevertheless, it is worth risking a cold bath to see the birds at close quarters. The Cape gannets are a little smaller than the Scottish "solan-goose" species, and their tails are black instead of white. With their yellow heads and white

plumage, they are extremely handsome. On the island they cover the few acres in dense, mass formation, always facing into the wind. Flying, they appear nonchalant until a fish is spied. Then they will dive for three hundred feet with wings folded - a spectacular dive as unerring as a bullet. Peculiar breathing arrangements enable them to remain below the surface for nearly four minutes. Seldom does a gannet emerge without a fish.

Nests are built of dried seaweed, and the male bird assists the female in hatching the single egg. The chicks die by the thousand owing to their foolish habit of wandering away from their own nests. Parent birds never seem to guide the young ones back to the nest. In spite of the heavy mortality, the gannets are a great source of revenue to the Union Government. They are more settled in their habits than other seabirds, and do not forsake their islands when they come in from the sea each season to breed. Malagas Island maintains a high yield of guano year after year.

Marcus Island took its name from a Corporal Marcus Robbeljaert of the Dutch East India Company. It is a sanctuary for penguins and also duikers, the shy black cormorants of Cape seas. The last Saldanha isle is Vondeling (foundling), fringed with rocks and offering neither treasure legend nor bird wealth. I cannot explain how this island became a foundling, unless there was once a good ship Vondeling which came to grief there.

During the 1939-45 war, Saldanha Bay became a "Gibraltar of the South". The port war signal station and the coastal batteries came first; then boom defences were organised, followed by a controlled minefield right across the entrance. This minefield provided one of the unsolved mysteries of the war. One night in 1944 the instruments showed that something was crossing the minefield. The firing lever was pulled, searchlights went on, water was blasted hundreds of feet into the air. There was nothing on the surface.

Next day a search revealed something on the floor of the bay in the mined area. A diver went

down at the first opportunity, but he was thwarted by the same difficult conditions which had defeated Lethbridge and his men centuries before. Trawlers swept the area and lost their wire on an obstruction. It might have been rock - or a submarine. Something tried to cross the minefield. That is all that can be said with certainty about the Saldanha Bay mystery.

Saldanha benefitted by the war to the extent of a jetty and a naval depot, but the greatest transformation has been brought about by the water scheme. If there had been fresh water at Saldanha in the days of Van Riebeeck, the present city of Cape Town would never have grown up in the shadow of Table Mountain. But there was no water worth mentioning - only the rain and a few brackish wells. No government voted the money for tapping the Berg River twenty-five miles away.

A friend of mine had set up what he called a "Shangrila" on the bank of the Berg River. There was a thatched cottage in this remote sanctuary, and he had a boat on the river and complete detachment from the poisons of civilisation. I

often drove up there with him and shared this solitude for a weekend. During the war my friend served in the Middle East. On his return to Cape Town he lost no time in heading for his "Shangrila". Visions of the place had been in his mind often enough in the Western Desert. Imagine his disgust when he found a large pumping station right alongside his property, and scores of native labourers bathing happily in the river. By this means, however, Saldanha now receives 600,000 gallons of fresh water every day. My friend found some consolation in the fact that he was able to sell his sanctuary at a profit. He has now gone further a field, out of reach of progress.

Such is the great bay which a crafty governor bought from the Hottentots for a few trinkets. I think fondly of Saldanha because I have found rest and shelter there after many a hard sail. In winter, the wet Cape winter, Saldanha basks under the sun. There are nights when the whole bay and lagoon are sheets of unrippled silver; it was on such a night that I steamed out with Morch Olsen to hunt the great blue whales. I was

in the first aeroplane that ever landed at Saldanha - a twinengined Handley Page in 1919, a very different contraption from the Catalinas I saw patrolling there a quarter of a century later.

Saldanha was my favourite weekend run in the days when motoring called for some mechanical skill. I watched the time cut down from six hours to two. The little hotel at Hoetjies Bay, crouching in the sand, with its old gramophone grinding out a dramatic record called "Wreck of a Troopship" ... this hotel is now two storeys high, with running water in every room. Still, Saldanha has not changed much, beyond the village. Van Riebeeck himself would still be at home in many an unspoilt corner of the bay.

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CHAPTER 7

WILD COAST, CALM RIVER

Could you mark the position of St. Helena Bay on a blank map of South Africa? Any member of an air crew who had been stationed near Cape Town would be successful; but this

huge bay is still unknown to most people living within a hundred miles of it.

St. Helena Bay is only eighty miles from Cape Town by air. It makes a great curve in the west coast beyond Saldanha, and the charts show many off lying reefs and rocks. The Berg River runs into the bay. I know the place because I have sailed up there in small yachts, flown over it, and driven there along sandy tracks. But it is still a lonely bay on a wild coast - a bay with an adventurous story. Ships are not safe here in all weathers. Offshore reefs have claimed many vessels; the anchorages are calm only during the summer months.

Nevertheless there is a strong and refreshing flavour of the sea in the little settlements on its shores - Paternoster, Stompneus and Steenberg's Cove. All three are fisheries; crawfish factories, weatherscarred boats, nets and dried fish are prominent. The stormy coast breeds a tough race of fishermen - men who sail far northwards to fill their holds and remain at sea for days in heavy weather.

Vasco da Gama named it St. Helena Bay, and that was his first landing in South Africa. While he was on shore, fixing his position by cross-staff or astrolabe, Hottentot beachcombers carrying firebrands appeared. They were gathering herbs and honey, and the Portuguese decided to entertain them on board ship that night. No record of the menu or wine list remains. The crafty explorers showed the savages pearls, gold, silver and spices in the hope of being led to the source of these riches. They were disappointed. A fight arose on shore next day - Vasco's men using their crossbows and the Hottentots hurling assegais. After a whale and seal hunt and a crawfishcatching expedition, Vasco da Gama filled his water casks in the Berg River and departed.

The Dutch East India ships called at St. Helena Bay occasionally to barter cattle, and the Company built barracks for a small garrison near Steenberg's Cove. The place was called Soldaten Post, and the ruins are still to be seen.

It was not until 1835, however, that a man of great enterprise, Mr. J.C. Stephan, bought a

trading site on the shores of St. Helena Bay and started opening up the district. He selected Stompneus Bay for his first fishing station. His son Carl assisted him. Up to that time Carl had been sailing in his father's cutter, carrying produce from the Berg River to Table filly. The purchase of Stompneus founded the prosperous firm which in later years became known as Stephan Brothers; for a marvellous snoeking season during the first year enabled the price to be paid outright. The snoek were sold in Mauritius, and the schooner returned with a profitable cargo of sugar.

In those days there were always swift, double-ended whaleboats ready to dash out of the coves of St. Helena Bay when the spout of a whale was reported. Sperm whales, humpbacks and finners were plentiful then, and men flung harpoons by hand from open boats.

The old fishermen of St. Helena Bay remember those hunts. The boats, with their fine lines, were designed for fast pulling or sailing. Much depended on the daring and skill of the skipper. He stood with his eighteenfoot steering

oar and shouted : "Stern all - stern all for your lives," when a whale turned with jaws wide open to attack the boat. If the crew were not quick enough the boats would be crushed. Headstones in the village burial grounds tell the rest of the tale.

The whale line was soft, strong Manila - two hundred fathoms of it coiled spirally in a tub in the stern. They coiled the line carefully and left the end free, so that the boat might live when the wounded whale took all the line and sounded. More often the whale became exhausted before all the line had gone. Then the boat would range alongside cautiously, giving the harpooner a chance to plunge his sharp lance into a vital spot.

A desperate game it was, exacting a heavy toll in human life. The modern explosive harpoon has taken almost all the danger out of it.

I remember very clearly my first voyage to St. Helena Bay in a small but sturdy twinscrew motor cruiser owned by a friend. The first part of the run, from Table Bay to Saldanha, was easy, for there are no off lying dangers. During the night one motor broke down, and as no one cared

to tinker with it in an engineroom filled with the aroma of paraffin, we put into Hoetjies Bay for repairs. Next morning my problems began, for I was navigator and the coastline between Saldanha and St. Helena Bay has ended the careers of many professional seamen.

Soon the little cruiser was pitching into the long swell while I peered ahead through the aching sunshine trying to identify the reefs and landmarks shown on the chart. A threeknot current had to be reckoned with. I had to fix our positions frequently to set course clear of all foul ground off that menacing shore.

One place I recognised, Jacob Bay, was guarded by a grim, waveswept islet called Jacob Rock. I had been to Jacob Bay by land and met a wonderful old Swede who lived there in a Robinson Crusoe shack for thirty years. Olsen was 81 when I called on him, and he is dead now; but he told me a grand tale of his struggle with the sea. He had sailed in ships of every rig, and he came to Cape Town in 1904, in a "spouter" - a New Bedford whaler. He decided to

take his share of the catch, a magnificent pay-day of £300, and sign off.

"I was cooper and I looked after the donkey-engine, too, so that brought me double money," Olsen told me. "Sometimes a whaling cruise was unlucky and men got next to nothing for three years' work. But 30 years ago my eyes were good - I often claimed the reward of five dollars and ten pounds of tobacco for sighting a whale. Aye, four men aloft in the barrels, and I was the first to shout."

"What was the shout?" I asked him.

"Thar blow 'ee!" bellowed Olsen. ("There she blows," is the fiction version.) "Thar blow 'ee - and sparm at that! Sparm was the one for a fight. I've seen a boat smashed and kicked into the air. I can see it now, the men seemed to come down much slower than the bits of boat."

Most of Olsen's £1,300 vanished in a reckless spree in Cape Town; but he kept enough to buy a small cutter. When Olsen reluctantly scrapped her she was eighty years old. In this boat Olsen went sealing with other tough Scandinavians at Jacob Rock, the islet I have mentioned, 'about a

mile offshore from Jacob Bay. A good season meant hundreds of pounds in cash.

Olsen had made himself a sealskin hat and waistcoat. The hut was an original design, a marvellous hat with a stovepipe top and a curved brim such as no other man had ever worn on land or sea. Olsen's shack had been enriched from time to time by the fickle sea. Fragments of wrecks had been embodied in it - a door from the steamer Haddon Hall, a solitary porthole from another vessel, a bunk from a third. The little, straggling place crouched down in the bushes near the shore, so that you might have sailed into the bay and seen nothing more than Carl Olsen's weathercock. On the beach lay several abandoned, rotting fishing boats. "Oh aye - it's a graveyard of the sea," remarked Olsen.

Jacob Bay is a place of refuge often used by the Saldanha fishermen when they are caught outside in heavy weather. In good times, snoek worth £1,000 may be landed at this place in the course of a favourable season. Rocks and boulders break the force of the seas at the

entrance, and the depth of three fathoms makes the anchorage safe.

I am back on board the motor cruiser, steering northwards towards St. Helena Bay. Now there is a mass of granite boulders on the coast. No mistake about the bold headland. I took bearings, checked the distance run and pricked the chart with satisfaction and relief. This was Cape Columbine, where men were at work building a great white lighthouse. (The four million candlepower electric lamp was switched on at Cape Columbine in October, 1936).

Amid the sand and reefs of Cape Columbine lie the bones of Dutch East India ships and the steel plates of modern passenger liners. Columbine takes its name from the barque Columbine, wrecked there in 1829. Not far away is Soldier's Reef, a name which speaks for itself when you know that in 1876 the troopship St. Lawrence was lost there.

Soldiers' Reef claimed another victim on October 23, 1910 - the fine Portuguese mail steamer Lisboa. Although the weather was calm, there was an accident while one of the boats was

being launched, and seven people were drowned. The rest reached the shore safely in the boats. The Lisboa was the first ship to send out the wireless distress call in South African waters.

There were bulls on board the Lisboa, destined for the ring at Lourenco Marques, and a cargo of red wine in barrels down below. For three weeks the Lisboa remained firmly on the rocks, looking as though she was at anchor. Salvage vessels saved the bulls, and the crews also brought away twenty magnificent washstands and a number of handsome, carved saloon chairs. I have specimens in my seaside cottage, bearing the crest of the Empresa Nacional de Navegacao. The washstand is of some dark hardwood, and it stands over six feet high. There is a good mirror. Every time I brush my hair I think of the passengers on board the Lisboa who used the same glass - Portuguese grandees bound for the African colonies, soldiers of fortune, men and women who looked into the mirror and passed on ... Perhaps I shall imagine a swarthy face at my shoulder one evening.

Many of the wheat farmers in the St. Helena Bay district gained richer souvenirs of the Lisboa. They have fine sets of silver plate, trays and sugarbowls, all stamped with the ship's name. When the Lisboa broke up in a gale at last the sea was stained red for miles with her wine. Scores of barrels came ashore. Customs officers did their best to guard this delicious flotsam; but in spite of their efforts many barrels were dragged away at night and buried among the sand dunes. One man was crushed to death by a huge cask which ran back while the donkeys were hauling it up a steep sandhill. Many casks remain buried, and no doubt nicely matured, to this day - those who salvaged them forgot the positions of the hiding places. The rusty boilers of the Lisboa may still be seen above the surf; but the wine seems to have been swallowed up by the sand for ever.

In June, 1944, only a few miles off Cape Columbine, occurred one of the tragic coincidences of the war. A small ex-German cargo steamer, which had been seized by the Union Government at the outbreak of war, met a

German submarine and was torpedoed. Twenty lives were lost. One of the lifeboats filled with survivors made her landfall at Cape Columbine lighthouse. The name of the lost ship was the Cape Columbine.

Paternoster, the little fishing village to the north of Cape Columbine, recalls a very old shipwreck from which a Roman Catholic priest was saved. He gave thanks on the beach for his deliverance, and the village was named after his prayer.

As I have said, the Berg River runs into St. Helena Bay, and there at the end of a long day's cruise the small yacht came to anchor. A fisherman, acting as pilot, brought us across the bar and up the river to Laaipek - the old loading place near the mouth. Here, too, the legend of the famous old Stephan brothers lingers. This place became the headquarters of their shipping, trading, fishing and farming enterprises.

At the beginning of the century, before there was even a narrow-gauge railway in the district, Laaipek was a flourishing port. They still talk of Carl Stephan's achievements in these parts. They

tell the story of the Neere, a wooden sailing ship of about 400 tons, which went aground at the Berg River mouth. The seas break white on the bar, the entrance is only 40 yards wide and made more dangerous by sandbanks. Carl Stephan bought the wreck for next to nothing, salvaged the cargo and then sailed the Neere herself triumphantly up the river.

High and dry on the mud, the Neere remained in the Berg River as a store ship for wheat and wool for 50 years. Carl's brother William used to live in the captain's cabin, while the fo'c'sle was filled with labourers. The ship was the firm's countinghouse. Smaller vessels came alongside to load. During the South African War, when General Smuts made his great commando raid into the Cape Colony, the Neere was fitted up as a fort. So many guns and sandbags were placed on deck that the soldiers finally broke the old Neere's back. Her keel snapped and she leaked, but she remained in the river until 1907, when she was destroyed by fire.

Many ships of the Stephan fleet were built on the Berg River - gallant little cutters like the

Good Hope, which went down with a cargo of coal off St. Helena Bay not so long ago. There was the Olive, loaded with grain, which made a fatal dive into a huge sea near the Saldanha entrance and did not rise again. The Hopefield Packet, Greyhound, and White Maria were others - splendid schooners, manned by sailormen of a hard school.

The test of seamanship set by Carl Stephan before he gave command of one of his vessels to a young mate was severe indeed. The man seeking promotion had to take one of the large decked cutters over the Berg River bar and back again into the river with a stiff northerly breeze blowing. Even in a motor cutter the navigation of the Berg River bar is considered a difficult task. Many lives have been lost on this menacing barrier of reef and sand fishermen are drowned there to this day. Stephan's cutters were driven, only by their sails. The man who came through that ordeal was a real master mariner.

At one time ships used to anchor in St. Helena Bay and send their boats up the Berg River on the flood tide with their water casks in tow.

When they had rowed about five miles they would wait for the last of the ebb, knock out the bungs, and fill the casks with excellent fresh water. The Berg River is one of the very few navigable rivers in the Cape Province. A vessel of five feet draught can reach a point 44 miles from the mouth in winter.

During winter floods the banks of the Berg River overflow, much of the country is submerged, and the torrent of fresh water pours far out to sea. Farmers are able to step into a dinghy close to their homesteads and row for miles to visit their neighbours. They do not mind these floods, for a rich silt is brought down and spread out over their lands.

The river has been surveyed several times with the idea of deepening the bar and making the entrance safe. Even now a vessel drawing six or seven feet of water may enter the river at high tide. So when you sail into the Berg River on some pleasure cruise of the future and make fast to the old wharf at Laaiplek, think of the men who once made this place a village of adventure and romance. Here bearded farmers came, after

trekking for 50 miles with their wagons, to sell their grain to Carl Stephan, the king of the river. Here they met the daring men of the schooners and cutters, sailors of a vanished fleet. I picture them talking round the fires at night, with the masts of the cutters black against the moon and the riding lights of the schooners gleaming down the bay outside.

The last hippopotamus in the Berg River was shot within living memory. Bushman hunters still inhabited the banks of the Berg River when the Dutch East India Company's explorers first made wagon tracks north of Cape Town. These Bushmen looked upon the hippos as their "royal game"; and for them the shooting of hippo by the white invaders was a serious matter. Their food supply was threatened. When they retaliated they became outlaws; many roving Bushman bands were wiped out, and the rest were driven away from the thin fringe of European civilisation.

The hippos remained in the river and were sniped at by farmers from time to time. If these farmers had possessed modern rifles there would

not have been even a solitary hippo alive in the Berg River at the beginning of the last century. But the muzzleloaders did little damage, merely peppering the twoinch hippo hides. Hippos in a river form a poor target at the best of times. They can keep below the water for ten minutes or longer; when they do emerge only the nostrils and eyes appear above the surface. Like many other great beasts, they only come out into the open to feed at night.

Gradually the Berg River hippos were thinned out, however, until, in 1803, Governor Tulbagh imposed a penalty of a thousand guilders for destroying a "river horse". The hippos seemed to realise that they were being protected; for soon we hear of them boldly walking round the house of a farmer at the river mouth in daylight. Sometimes they swam out to sea, but always they returned to the Berg River.

They were a great nuisance, for a hippo walks through fences, over trenches and even through barbed wire entanglements as if they did not exist. Crops and vegetables look as though a team roller had passed over them.

When James Holman paddled down the Berg River from Tulbagh to the mouth in a canoe a hundred years ago he reported that four old hippos and two young ones were left. In spite of the protection, a good many tons of tasty hippo meat must have been consumed in the homesteads along the river. The ribs of the hippo, too, are covered with a delicate fat which was known to the farmers as "zeekoe spek" - it made wonderful pastry.

Cape Town newspapers began to record the death of the last Berg River hippo as early as December 6, 1841. This "last hippo" was shot again and again during the next twenty-eight years. A hippo was stuffed for the South African Museum in 1853 and mourned as the last. The genuine last hippo of the Berg River foolishly attacked two coloured boys, who were bathing, and killed one of them. Mr. Melck, the farmer on whose land this occurred, shot the hippo. It measured 11 feet 6 inches from snout to tip of the tail, and weighed 3,000 lbs. That was in 1869, so that there may still be old men in the district who remember the incident.

Though we may deplore the passing of the Berg River hippos, it is not difficult to understand why they were thinned out by the farmers and finally exterminated. Henry Lichtenstein, the famous German traveller, writing at the time of his visit to the Berg River in 1802, says: "These river horses often came ashore at night and did great damage in the fields, not only eating the young corn, but tramping down a great deal more with their heavy unwieldy feet."

So now I know that I can swim without fear of a great dark shape suddenly emerging to drag me under. Bathing is safe, yet some of the fascination of the Berg River departed with the last hippo. I seem to hear on the eardrum of memory, the voice of the last, lone hippo - the booming sound that Stacpoole calls "a deep organ note, unlike the sound emitted by any other creature on earth". Now only the cattle slake their thirst here, and nothing remains of the Berg River hippos but their favourite playground called Zeekoe Eiland (Hippo Island) to this day.

One last memory of St. Helena Bay - a sea mystery that has never been solved.

Heavy seas from the north in May, 1932, threw a barnacle encrusted wooden hulk on to the rocks at Steenberg's Cove. At first the fishermen thought it was a dead whale. Then they saw it was a ship - or half a ship - that had reappeared after years on the bed of the ocean.

Fragments of wood that broke adrift revealed signs of scorching; and the theory was advanced that this was an old ship that had been captured by pirates and set on fire after looting. The ship would then have burnt down to the waterline and sunk. Sand would have filled the remains of the hull, and it would have rested on the bottom until strong currents scoured out the sand. Then the old ship would become a derelict, drifting just below the surface, a menace to navigation. Someone remembered the disappearance, in the summer of 1882, of a fine Cape schooner, the Maria Fredrika.

Loaded with empty casks, the Maria Fredrika had left Table Bay for Saldanha. She was a well-found, seaworthy schooner with a dark past -

they said that under other owners she had been in the "blackbirding" trade, a slaver to all intents and purposes. For some years before she vanished, however, the Maria Fredrika had led a respectable life taking cargo up and down the coast. Captain Manie Fernandez, her master, was one of the most experienced seamen in these waters at the time. Captain Fernandez put to sea in a howling south-easter - just the weather he needed for a fast passage north to the fishing stations. Soon after he left, the wind increased to hurricane force. A large schooner running reefed before the wind, however, should not have been overwhelmed by such conditions.

That night Mr. H. R. Stephan, owner of the vessel, dreamt that the Maria Fredrika had foundered with all hands near Dassen Island. Messages were sent to Saldanha and other ports asking for news of her; but no news came. There was not a body, not a spar or lifebuoy washed ashore to suggest the fate of the Maria Fredrika.

The son and grandson of Captain Fernandez, remembering the Maria Fredrika, made enquiries about the hulk at St. Helena Bay. They found

that certain details tallied with the description of the lost schooner; and they became convinced that after fifty years the Maria Fredrika had reappeared like a ghost.

The most important clue, to my mind, was that of the scorched planking. A disastrous fire would account for the total loss of a schooner, which could hardly have been destroyed by the sea during a short coastal passage. The weather, of course, would have swamped the boats.

Many old seamen examined the wreck, but no definite clue could be found. At last Customs officials broke up the battered hull to remove a danger to shipping. The story of the scorched hull remains a secret of St. Helena Bay.

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CHAPTER 8

THE LOST VALLEY

I am dreaming over the chart on board a small yacht in the Berg River. The whole coast to the Orange River lies before me - the wild coast of fog and surf, sand dunes and diamonds.

Already I know most of the little harbours; but here is a name that arouses my curiosity.

Verloren Vallei says the chart - "Lost Valley". At once I know that I must set out in quest of the Lost Valley. There it is, less than forty miles from where I am sitting, and I have never seen it. At the end of the valley is a slight indentation called Eland's Bay. The sailing directions advise caution. No anchorage is shown on the chart; and the "Africa Pilot" declares bluntly; "Vessels approaching this part of the coast cannot be too careful, as it has not yet been properly sounded". In the face of these difficulties I decide to go by road.

The route leads through Piquetberg and then along the narrow vlei road to the sea. The vlei should really be seen in winter, when the reeds are green and weaver birds manoeuvre round their nests. Then the water flows down the length of the valley and breaks through the blind mouth to join the South Atlantic. Yet even in summer the scene is not without beauty. The people of the "Lost Valley" prefer to build homesteads of the old type; thatch and gables,

clay ovens and whitewashed walls are more prominent than corrugated iron. For miles the road is lined with gardens. Palms and pumpkins, even bananas, may be seen growing. I noticed more turkeys in a day than I had seen for years.

Carp exist in the muddy pools during the summer, and flourish in winter when the vlei becomes a wide expanse for miles. You observe the first boats not long after leaving Redelinghuis. Birds and men must feast on fish when the vlei is full.

Flamingo's find sanctuary there. Longbilled herons nest in the reedbeds. Cranes and golden cuckoos, gay sugar birds and finches give life and colour to the "Lost Valley".

And so at last the huge brown headland appears, marking the end of the valley. Now you must travel cautiously, testing the track ahead for heavy sand. White dunes appear, with a store and postal agency overlooking the sea.

Eland's Bay has two other names - Cape Deseada and Baboon Point. I traced a dozen

grotesque baboon faces in the rocks that rise to six hundred feet and dominate the bay.

You must go on foot to Baboon Point, along the hard beach, past the sandblocked vlei mouth, over rocks and dunes. I saw the little passage in the reef where the fishermen haul their boats on shore. This is safe when southerly winds blow; but at other times the daring fishermen run for a little nook on Baboon Point itself. Waiting for the right moment, boat after boat races for a sloping, seawashed boulder. The boats are hauled up on to the granite, and the catches landed. Lives have been lost on this dangerous point. About thirty boats, worked by eighty men (who combine fishing with farming), venture out from Eland's Bay. They supply the whole valley with snoek in the season. Crawfish are caught and loaded into motorcutters from St. Helena Bay and Lambert Bay.

Eland's Bay, in January, 1918, was the scene of an odd incident that is still discussed in the valley. Mr. Abraham Louw and his son Gert, farmers visiting the beach by cart, found a queer metal object which they were unable to identify.

There was a cap which they unscrewed, and a brown liquid trickled out. They tasted it, suspecting molasses, perhaps, but were none the wiser.

Sending for tools, the determined Mr. Louw now attacked the metal container with sledge hammer and cold chisel. Still he was unable to reach the mysterious interior. Then son Gert had an inspiration. He put a match to the liquid, and in a moment there was a furance that roared up to two hundred feet. The horse bolted with the cart, and before Mr. Louw senior could jump clear he had lost his beard in the flames.

Police investigated the affair, and made out a report which brought a naval officer from Simonstown to the scene. The expert found that the Louws, in all innocence, had been handling a German mine dropped by the raider Wolf. They had dismantled the primer with a tinopener and chopped off the horns. The brown liquid they had tasted was T.N.T. The only mystery that remained was why the mine had not exploded. I believe the mine is still to be seen at Simonstown.

A great hush rested over the "Lost Valley" for many years after that incident. Not until March, 1941, did the name of Eland's Bay appear in the headlines, and then it was as the result of an air disaster that shocked the Union.

Down the coast in dense fog roared a Lockheed Lodestar airliner, bound from Walvis Bay to Cape Town. The pilot had been flying over the sea; but evidently hoping to sight a landmark he came low beneath the fog and turned towards the coast. This is an old trick which usually enables a pilot to find his bearings. On this occasion, however, he suddenly found himself over the land instead of the sea. A few seconds later he struck the high ridge of Cape Deseada and all on board were killed instantly.

The dead included Rear-Admiral G. W. Hallifax, first Director of Seaward Defence, two other senior officers, the crew of four and three civilian passengers.

If you can walk fourteen miles along the sandy tracks north of Eland's Bay you will trudge at last into another of South Africa's little-known harbours.

This is Lambert Bay on the rainless coast of the Sandveld, port and holiday resort of the Clanwilliam district. It is remote. I have travelled by road, nearly two hundred miles from Cape Town to reach it; and in the sweltering valley at Clanwilliam, with the temperature 110 degrees in the shade, I learned why the farmers love to dash down the hard road to their neat cottages at "the Bay".

Within a few miles of Lambert Bay the heat vanishes, and sea breezes play on grilled faces. The cold Atlantic current which sweeps up the western seaboard for hundreds of miles is responsible for the change. Even the fogs caused by the clash of icy sea and hot winds are preferable to the sunbaked Sandveld.

Lambert Bay is noteworthy as the scene of one of the "naval actions" of the South African War. Colonel Deneys Reitz, in "Commando ", described the incident. Some of the burghers of the raiding commando reached the coast and found a small British gunboat at anchor off Lambert Bay. They fired on her from the dunes,

the gunboat promptly replied, and the engagement ended without a casualty on either side.

It was during the same period that H.M.S. Sybil was lost six miles south of Lambert Bay; but this was due to fog, not fighting. Her guns were salvaged. The wreck could still be seen at low tide in recent years.

Long ago, before the coming of the railway, the grain and produce of the district was shipped in Stephan's ships from Lambert Bay. The railway almost wiped out the flourishing seaport. Then came the crawfish factories and a revival of prosperity. Some of the fishermen work during the guano collecting season on Penguin Islet. This glaring white islet dominates the village. It is forty feet high, and only a narrow rocky channel separates it from the beach. Thousands of birds, screaming like banshees, hover and dive incessantly round the island - a sight fascinating to watch, and one which makes the long journey to Lambert Bay worth while.

Tony d'Almeida, our old friend of Dassen Island, is now in charge of Penguin Islet. Many sacks of valuable guano are gathered there every

year; and it is necessary to guard the birds which provide all this wealth. Tony d'Almeida told me the story of Penguin Islet. Birds have been his life-long study. "Penguin Islet was once a penguin stronghold," said d'Almeida. "A few years ago it changed hands and became the home of malagas and duikers."

He pointed across the Channel. I saw the voracious malagas, with their yellow necks, on the flat spaces of the island; and the swift black duikers flying in lines, or resting gorged on the rocks.

"Some say that the malagas suddenly invaded the islet, fought the penguins, and drove them away," went on d'Almeida. "Certainly there is only one small colony of penguins huddled together in a corner there today, merely tolerated by the malagas. But I believe the penguins left Penguin Islet because the fishermen killed them and used them for bait. I am sorry they have gone. Penguins are the most amusing and interesting birds in the world. One day I'll write a book about penguins - they ought to make it a school book. The malagas produce a greater

quantity of guano than the penguins, but penguin guano is richer and better."

I like following a river down to its mouth. Often enough the meeting place of fresh water and salt ocean is in remote country; often it is a scene of old dramas all unknown to the thousands who dwell inland along the river banks.

If the river mouth is open to the sea, like the Berg River, there is always the prospect of a cruise in some small craft which will turn inshore at last, forsake deep water and enter the river channel to explore a new and calmer world. Along the Cape west coast there are only three rivers that flow in winter and summer - the Berg, the Olifants and the Orange - and only the Berg is navigable. Yet, as I shall show, there have been men daring enough to take boats in and out of the reefs and sandbanks and surf at the mouth of the almost impossible Olifants River.

The Olifants bursts into the South Atlantic thirty miles north of Lambert Bay. Twice I have struggled through the sand to the lonely beach,

simply to hear the tales of the fishermen; especially the story of Elephant Rock.

This river mouth is the spot where a seventeenth century expedition buried one of its wagons and provisions and pushed on northwards with pack oxen. Defeated by lack of water in their quest for Vigiti Magna, they returned to find that the Hottentots had burnt the wagon and stolen the stores. It was a hard journey back to Table Bay.

Sir James Alexander reached the Olifants mouth during his 1836 expedition, and stood watching the flamingos and flocks of gulls at the entrance. In a small mat hut he found Hendrik van Zyl and his son splitting, salting and drying fish. (Today the harders still cross the bar in huge shoals and are netted by the people of Viswater village.) Alexander crossed to the north bank in a boat rowed by an exsoldier who had served in Napoleon's army, a veteran of Austerlitz and Jena.

Another tough explorer who gave one of the first descriptions of the river mouth was Captain Benjamin Morrell, the American sealer. "This

river is not navigable for vessels, nor even boats, unless the sea is very smooth, as there is a bar stretching across its entrance with only two feet of water on it," he wrote. "As the westerly swell is constantly heaving in on this coast, there are generally heavy breakers on the bar. But within this bar there is plenty of water for a large ship for the distance of two miles up the river in front of a small village, where several Dutch farmers reside. If there could be a passage cut through the bar at the mouth of the river it would be the finest harbour on the west coast of Africa."

And thus we find official commissions and experts trekking through the sand again and again at intervals of years and issuing reports and schemes for the dredging of a channel into the river. The first expert sent by the Cape Government in 1859 was a Mr. P. S. Fletcher, a surveyor. He spent two months in this lonely spot, trying to discover whether the river could be turned into a harbour. Every day he observed the tidal conditions, the depth of water on the bar and the break of the sea at the entrance.

Mr. Fletcher was assisted by the only fisherman living at the river mouth in those days-William Love, owner of a whaleboat and evidently a fine seaman. Besides fishing, Love had an interest in the sealing at Elephant Rock, three miles further up the coast. For twenty years Love supplied the men on Elephant Rock with fresh water and food. It is nothing more than a rock, and if Love had failed, the men would have perished; as indeed some have died since then. Love was most patient and ingenious in pulling in and out of the treacherous river mouth. He could not negotiate the main channel, but he found a way out through a small channel running northwards, between a collection of rocks called Hartebeest Klip and the shore.

This was often a desperate business, as you will realise if ever you stand on the promontory overlooking the mouth and the reef strewn Hartebeest Channel. It could only be done at high water about once in ten days. They pulled into the channel and rested on their oars until Love saw a chance of taking the double ended whaleboat through the sharpfanged rocks to the

safety of the open sea. Love used a twenty-six foot steering our; an almost incredible piece of timber which only an expert could have wielded. Often enough he had to wait for hours in this rocky gulchway while the surf thundered on Hartebeest Klip. One, two, sometimes three seas would break as the whaleboat raced towards open water. Love always made the passage, always returned safely. He was the only man who ever used the Olifants River mouth regularly, and the local fishermen still talk of his prowess.

Mr. Fletcher declared that the Hartebeest Channel could be opened, and that cutters drawing up to six feet would then be able to enter the Olifants and sail for twenty-three miles up the river. This would have opened up a district which, in those days, depended entirely on oxwagons for transport.

No action was taken by the Cape Government; but in 1883 a Captain May was sent to the mouth to report on the possibilities; in 1888 another official visit took place; the project was investigated again in 1893; and finally, in

1928, a Union Government committee examined the problem on the spot with the idea of providing a fishing harbour. Nothing has yet been done in spite of all recommendations. It seems that it will take an atomic explosive to clear the Hartebeest Channel and turn the Olifants into a navigable river.

Two more odd stories about the Olifants mouth before I pass on to weird Elephant Rock. There is a large island just inside the river; some call it Big Island and others Bird Island. Sometimes it is 250 acres in area; then floods wash the land away and it dwindles to a bare twelve acres. During one of my visits, in 1934, it was not an island at all, for I walked on to it along a sandy ridge from the beach.

Big Island was once the scene of a fatal drinking party. I have told you about the wreck of the Portuguese liner Lisboa far away to the south, and the casks of wine that drifted ashore. One cask of dry port drifted all the way to the Olifants mouth with the Benguella current and was seized eagerly by three fishermen. They

rolled it on to Big Island, broached it and drank until they died.

The other Olifants incident that lingers in my memory was something I saw myself. It was a large motor fishing cutter at anchor in the river which, according to all the authorities, cannot be entered by anything larger than a whaleboat. Yet there she was with her high bows and counter stern. I asked the fishermen about her. She had been there for a year, they said. The skipper had brought her in all right, but when he tried to take her out he found it was impossible. I believe that in the end they hauled her out of the water, jacked her on to a couple of wagons and launched her again at Lambert Bay.

Elephant Rock, alive and crawling with seals and sea elephants, must have been known to hunters for centuries. No doubt the Strandlopers secured meat there, and after them the Hottentots. But the first white man to make a dangerous living out of the place was an old Swede named Pieter Nielson, early last century. Queer how old Swedes settle on this coast and hunt the seals. There was one you have met, the

"Robinson Crusoe" of Jacob's Bay; and there is another, far away up at Cape Cross, who you will hear about much later.

Now here is old Nielson, without a boat, paddling across the dangerous passage to Elephant Rock on a raft. "The surf is tremendous, and the danger of access is so great that no one will accompnay him on these perilous expeditions," wrote the traveller Buissinne in 1820. "This man informed me that with a proper establishment from three to four thousand seals may be killed annually."

When Sir James Alexander was there in 1836 the Namaqua Hottentots told him that they swam the narrow channel and killed the seals for food. The preserved meat was enough to keep three hundred of their people alive for a year.

Two traders named Eddington and Kennedy were at work on the island at this period. They paid the Hottentots five shillings a skin and sold them in Cape Town for eighteen shillings apiece; while in London each skin fetched two or three pounds. Elephant Rock provides a fascinating study in sand formation. In winter the sand piles

up in the channel on the landward side, so that it is possible to walk out to the island at low water. (The island lies about 160 yards from the beach.) In summer the channel is always at least two or three fathoms deep. It is during November and December, when the sea gives some protection, that the seals haul up to breed.

I stood on the beach opposite Elephant Rock and watched a phenomenon of the sea. There is a continual cross sea between the island and the shore; waves come round each end of the rock, advance with white crests, meet and hesitate and pass on. They form neat geometrical designs - often a parallelogram of watery forces.

Many men have been drowned in that channel. Some years ago about a dozen men were clubbing seals on the rock when the sea came up and made it impossible for the boat to reach them. They had a little food and water, and they made it last for eight days. Becoming desperate, three of the men plunged into the channel, but only one reached the shore. There is a cave on Elephant Rock. The men in the cave, weak from thirst, saw their comrades drown and

decided to remain where they were. Three died before help came to the survivors. Now you will always find barrels of fresh water and boxes of food in the cave for use in emergencies.

Elephant Rock is fifty feet high, about two hundred yards long and about the same in breadth. You can see a chain, with one end fixed into a ringbolt in the rock long ago. This gives the seal hunters a chance of mooring their whale-boat. They clamber on shore with nets, herd the seals into the cave and club them there. I saw blubber pots on the beach and drums filled with seal oil. Black seal pelts, covered with salt, were stretched out to dry. There must have been thousands of seals on the rock and in the water. Elephant Rock has another name, which you will find on some charts, but which is no longer used by the seal hunters. It is Morrell Island, in honour of that fine old sailorman, Captain Benjamin Morrell, who made so many discoveries along the Cape and South-West African coasts. I think he deserved a more important memorial, though Elephant Rock must have been a place after his own heart. Morrell

was a sealhunter, and you will travel a long way before you find a larger colony than the seals of Elephant Rock.

North and south of Elephant Rock run the diamond beaches. Every tide sweeps diamonds on shore; and ever since 1927 blueclad police sentries, the most desperately bored men in the Union, have been patrolling that lone coast. You may be surprised to learn that the "furthest south" police camp is only 150 miles from Cape Town. The place is called Bamboes Bay, because the sea bamboo is piled high on the beach after heavy gales. I sat in a cave there with two troopers and listened to their tales of the diamond coast.

One of them pointed to the cliff above the camp where the initials "J.M. - S.A.P." had been painted on the rock. That was the way one policeman had passed the time. He had risked his neck climbing up there with paintpot and brush; and when he had done it he became tired of looking at his own initials and decided to paint them out again. But he could never reach the dangerous ledge. It was too difficult. "J.M. -

S.A.P." has left his mark for a long time to come. "We'll stick to fishing, and studying for promotion," said the men at Bamboes Bay.

All the richest deposits are so well protected that the gangs which once dashed to the coast by night and returned with sacks of rich gravel would stand no chance at the present time. There are patches of ground on that coast where, in ten minutes, a man might collect diamonds worth £6,000. Such places are fenced in and never left alone.

Other places (such as Toren, to the north of the Olifants River mouth, which I visited) are not so easily looted. The diamonds lie under a couple of feet of sand and gravel. It would take a day or two to locate them. So there are no barriers in these places. Each spot is in charge of two or more young constables, who carry out daily patrols north and south of their stations, always at low tide. At high water the cold South Atlantic surf protects the diamonds, and the police may rest. You may call on these lonely policemen if you wish, and stand on beaches where unsuspected wealth lay hidden for cen-

turies. But there are strange crimes in Namaqualand, and many things are forbidden.

"You must not carry a spade or even pick up a pebble," a constable explained to me." When the farmers come and camp out with their families on these beaches at New Year, we have to warn them that their children cannot play as other seaside children do, with spades and buckets."

The police are always on the alert for pot-holes and signs of digging. They play the cat-and-mouse game. When they find a newly dug hole in the ground they wait under cover at night. Sooner or later the diamond poachers return. Then the law pounces on them. No need to prove they are in possession of diamonds. Their spades and sheepskin shoes (used to deaden the sound of footsteps) mark them as lawbreakers.

The men in the diamond outposts welcome a raid. Weeks pass, as a rule, without excitement; and the capture of a band of raiders may lead to promotion.

For a week or two, the life here is like a seaside holiday," one young constable told me. "Then the heat, followed by wind or cold sea

fog, begins to worry you. At the end of a year you wonder whether you will ever be a normal person again. A spell of leave does not do much good - all the time you are away there is the unpleasant thought of returning to this desolation. Married men are never sent to the Namaqualand coast. If a man marries, he is transferred at once. I have known men marry, just for that."

My friends the constables at one outpost had a pet baboon. They had collected hundreds of pebbles of different colours and laid them out in the shape of a huge South African Police badge in front of their reed hut. Such is the hobby which is the pathetic substitute for gardening on a coast where nothing can be cultivated.

Fresh water has to be brought to these camps in iron drums for twenty miles or more. The men draw their free rations, mostly in tins, and pay a coloured servant to do their cooking. They have a firstaid kit and a snakebite outfit. Life goes on, though for days, and often weeks, they see no strangers. Thus the visitor (especially one with a bundle of newspapers) is hospitably welcomed and entertained to tea with condensed milk. It

tastes good on the Namaqualand coast. They are all trying to save money, possibly with the idea of marriage and escape from Namaqualand. Occasionally you find a man with a motorcycle. Most of them are cut off completely from the farms and villages of the hinterland. They patrol the beaches, scrambling over rocks, trudging through the sand at burning noonday or bitter midnight, cursing the great diamond discovery and the duty that has made them exiles.

Hondeklip Bay, the next little harbour on this desolate coast, takes its name from a granite boulder, seventeen feet high. Once it resembled a dog, but an old Hottentot told me that it had been struck by lightning, and today you will see a stone dog only by a strong effort of the imagination.

Van der Stel discovered Hondeklip on his famous Namaqualand journey, but until a century ago the place remained bare, waterless, sandy veld. Then the enterprising brothers, Aaron and Elias de Pass, opened a trading store there. Aaron was the grandfather of the Mr. A. A. de Pass who has given art treasures worth

thousands to South African museums and galleries. From such desolate spots as Hondeklip Bay came the family fortune which enabled those gifts to be made.

In 1855 there were black wooden buildings round the edge of the bay. Port Nolloth had not yet been developed as a harbour, and for years all the copper from the Namaqualand mines came down to Hondeklip by ox wagon to be loaded into schooners.

One early visitor described his arrival at Hondeklip in a schooner which brought a cargo of coffins filled, for reasons of economy, with onions. All fresh water had to be taken by sea from Cape Town as the rain water tanks were insufficient to supply the growing settlement. Brandy arrived in sixteengallon casks, and no smaller quantities could be bought. The drivers of the copper wagons clubbed together and embarked on mad carousals.

The magistrate at this wild period in Hondeklip's history was a Mr. Pillans, a man of great strength. As he had no police to assist him he dragged offenders to the lockup with his own

hands. Next day he combined the duties of witness, prosecutor and magistrate. When the small gaol overflowed with wicked humanity, Mr. Pillans posted up a notice stating that any more men arrested would be chained to the jetty. There was a great trade in contraband liquor to the copper mines, but smugglers went in fear of the redoubtable Mr. Pillans.

Bishop Grey, that energetic traveller, was at Hondeklip in 1866 and described it as a "thriving little seaport". A printing press was installed there two years later and programmes were printed for the first amateur play by the Namaqualand Dramatic Society. The monotony was also broken from time to time by shipwrecks on the treacherous approaches to the bay; but seldom was there any loss of life. Hondeklip wrecks in those early days included the cutter Maria (in which the master lost his wife); one of Stephan's schooners; the schooner Volunteer, the S.S. Namaqua, and the sailing ships Ispahan and Manhegan.

Portable gallows were erected at Hondeklip in 1876 and a native shepherd was hanged for

murder. In recent years the lesser crime of illicit diamond digging has brought Hondeklip into the news occasionally. The police are rightly suspicious of strangers; but about ten years ago they made a mistake. Small automatic light and fog diaphones were being set up at that time, and the lighthouse engineer arrived to inspect the work. He sent his labourers down to the diamondiferous beach to collect stones for the building. Then the police stepped in. Only after messages had been exchanged with police headquarters was the engineer allowed to proceed with his task.

Hondeklip Bay watched feverish activity in 1943, after the Brazilian steamer Piratiny became a total loss on the coast to the north. Cutters from the Hondeklip crawfish factory ran alongside the ship and brought off many small packages of clothing. Then a cableway was rigged to the beach, so that heavier merchandise could be salvaged and transported overland by motorlorries. The journey to Hondeklip in low gear usually took three hours, and then every case and bale had to be slung into fishing boats

and taken out to the waiting coaster. Seven weeks after the work started the ship broke up and the beaches were strewn for miles with rolls of dress materials, stockings and silks. The flattened funnel and many other relics of the Piratiny are still lying there.

Salvage men had to camp near the beach and fetch all their fresh water from a spot forty miles away. "We lived like beachcombers - but not on the beach," one of the salvage engineers told me. "Police patrols were always paying us surprise visits to make sure that we were after cargo, not diamonds. No one was allowed on the shore after sundown."

It was close to Hondeklip Bay that the trawler *Aristea* struck the rocks in July, 1945. A coloured seaman was drowned while helping to take a line to the shore, but the other twentytwo men on board were saved. The *Aristea* was thrown ashore on her beamends, so far up the beach that it was possible to remove a great deal of her equipment. Hazy weather was responsible for this and many other wrecks on the Hondeklip coast. Small craft have been lost crossing the bar

into Hondeklip Bay. The seas break dangerously in the winter months, and the cutter that is "pooped" on the bar needs an expert at the tiller if disaster is to be averted.

All diamond deposits I have shown you so far have been mere potholes, hardly worth guarding. But now, less than fifty miles north of Hondeklip Bay, the fabulously rich diamond crater of Kleinzee opens out before you.

Kleinzee stands beside one of those dry and sandy river beds which are typical of the whole west coast. This is the Buffels River, but you may have to wait for years to see water in it. Long ago, however, the flowing river must have brought down diamonds. Soon after the Alexander Bay discovery in 1927, the Kleinzee treasure was revealed by accident. There was a farm school near the river mouth in charge of a teacher named De Villiers. This man had been there for sixteen years; his heart was in his work, and while others were eagerly prospecting along the coast, De Villiers was building a new school.

It was a simple house of sundried bricks, and De Villiers intended to whitewash the walls. He

walked across the veld one day with Alberts, the mason, in search of lime. De Villiers kicked the earth in every promising spot. By chance he kicked up a diamond.

Alberts, who had a brother-in-law who was a lawyer, drove swiftly to Springbok with the news. A syndicate was formed. Alberts and De Villiers found ten more diamonds within sixteen days; a week later they had registered 600 carats and sold them for £6,000. Then a large company bought the claims for £35,000. I hope the hard-working schoolmaster, the mason and the lawyer were satisfied. Only a week after they had sold out the famous Kleinzee crater was opened, and the first haul (insignificant compared with later finds) was valued at £120,000. The farm which could not have grazed a hundred sheep for a week had become a treasurehouse.

They put barbedwire round it then, and police guarded the gate. Kleinzee became a little Kimberley, with a huge crushing, washing and pulsator plant dealing with a thousand tons of gravel a day. There are neat electrically lit homes,

messes for the single men, barracks for the native labourers.

Manager of this costly enterprise at the time of my visit was a wellbuilt, clean-shaven man named Jack Carstens. You will meet him again in a few moments when I have put the clock back more than twenty years. Jack Carstens was the first man to discover diamonds in Namaqualand. He and his brother should have been millionaires. :-

CHAPTER 9

FORTUNES FOR SOME

One day in 1925 I watched old Mr. William Carstens and his son Jack at work on their claims six miles south of Port Nolloth. In my mind was no inkling of the sensational discoveries which would soon follow this little enterprise. I am not going to be wise after the event.

In those days anyone could become a prospector, go where he wished with spade and sieve, turn up a fortune - or return to Port Nolloth empty-handed. I simply looked at the discoverers, saw them washing their gravel and

thought what a dreary and unprofitable business it was. Yet this was the prelude to Alexander Bay; here on the barren shore was the key to a treasurehouse which has yielded millions and will reveal millions more. It should have rung a bell in my bored mind. Instead, I walked away feeling thankful that I had booked my passage to Cape Town in the coasting steamer Pemba. I went back to the hotel and drank a glass of beer.

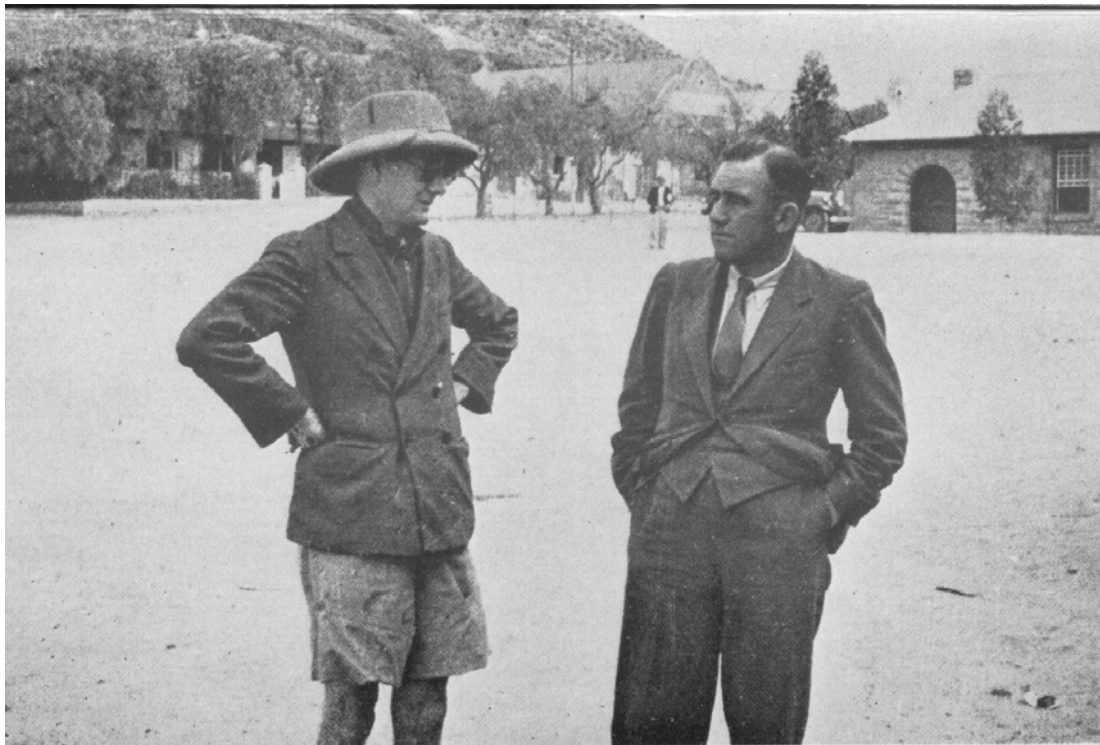
Long afterwards Mr. Carstens told me the whole story. He was eighty-four then, and not long ago his ninetieth birthday was recorded in the newspapers. Mr. Carstens said that he had heard of gravel to the south of Port Nolloth before the 1914-18 War; a farmer had brought him samples, and it looked promising. But his sons went away to the war, and he thought no more of it for ten years. Not until 1925 did they open up the deposit. Jack Carstens was the first of the family to pick a diamond out of the wash. It was not a rich deposit, but their finds more than covered expenses and they discussed further prospecting.

Jack Carstens wanted to go north, to Alexander Bay. "It's a washout," declared his old father. Thus the Carstens family lost millions. Dr. Hans Merensky, a geologist who had long believed in the presence of diamonds at the Orange River mouth, heard of the small finds made by the Carstens family and set out to test his own theory. Early in 1927 he opened up the famous fossil oyster terraces. In six weeks diamonds worth £ 150,000 were recovered.

Such a secret could not be kept for long. The great Namaqualand diamond rush started - and the Union Government, to save the diamond market from collapse, stepped in and banned further prospecting. Moreover, the Government took up its mineral rights in the whole neighbourhood beyond the Merensky claims and soon revealed wealth far greater than Merensky's wildest dreams. Two labourers in official employment at 7s. 6d. a day moved a small boulder aside and found diamonds valued at £500,000. This was Aladdin's Cave indeed. The rush became a drama.

To understand the difficulties and the final victory of the law over the diamond raiders you must visualise the coast of Namaqualand as it was just after Dr. Merensky had patiently followed the scientific trail to the main diamond deposit at Alexander Bay. Even then prospecting was still permitted all along the coast to the south, and on the beaches where every tide washed diamonds on to the rocks. Alexander Bay itself was wired and guarded, but there was nothing to prevent men creeping up the fence at night and receiving diamonds flung to them in tins filled with porridge to prevent the telltale rattle.

White labourers employed on the State diggings were searched when they left; but a hundred clever devices were used, and for every man caught a score escaped with their loot. Some of the boldest swallowed their diamonds; one man was found by the police with twenty-five diamonds of fair sizes in his stomach, diamonds worth £8,000. It was a trick which was not so dangerous as it appears to be, for there



The Author (left) talking to Mr. Jack Carstens, first discoverer of diamonds in Namaqualand.

were no deaths. Others hid their diamonds in deep cuts in their legs. Even when the bandages were removed the diamonds were well concealed by the flesh.

Thus it was necessary first to guard the long stretch of diamondiferous coast, besides rich "potholes" farther inland. Equally important was the prevention of all leakages from the State diamond diggings at Alexander Bay.

If the police had failed in this enormous task, the control of the diamond output would have broken down. State and illicit dealer alike would have been left in possession of worthless stones as a result of a glutted market. Indeed, the illicit trade in Namaqualand actually threatened the market and depressed the price of diamonds before the police precautions became effective.

In Port Nolloth I heard the story of the diamond war and learnt from police officers how the barricade against invaders had been thrown up and maintained. Port Nolloth is the headquarters of the Diamond Detective Department - the "D.D.D.", which started in the

old days at Kimberley and spread its quiet activities wherever diamonds were found afterwards. I do not suppose the Gestapo ever knew more about suspects than the plainclothes men of the "D.D.D." know about the people in the huge diamond area of Namaqualand.

At first the police were hampered by the law, which banned prospecting along the coast but did not make illegal the presence of hordes of diggers close to the sources of the diamonds. A test case established the fact that it was not illegal to prospect in the sea or between high and low water mark, so that the law had to be altered before this large loophole could be closed.

It was said at that time that more diamonds were being sold in Port Nolloth than in Hatton Garden. Every dark night, when the tide was low, men worked in the ice-cold water, filled sacks with gravel, and dashed away in fast cars to wash their finds. Sore legs were the marks of the raider. The game of hide-and-seek in the sand dunes was played for months before the police, reinforced and supported by new laws,

were able to make these night raids too dangerous for profit.

Even now there are a few determined men who still send natives into the prohibited area. Even now there are a few white men who are found trespassing within the fences wearing sheepskin shoes to cover their tracks, seeking, no doubt, the "parcels" they buried and lost long ago. These men serve their sentences and appear at regular intervals to repeat the offence.

So the police guardians cannot relax. Along the richest coastal areas, from a point three miles north of Port Nolloth, a barbedwire fence has been built. It runs all the way to the Orange River, every gate is a police post, and every yard of the fence is patrolled at night. There are many false alarms. New men are always reporting the evening star as a "suspicious light". One police officer spent a whole night crawling through the thick black mud of the Orange River bank tracing a sound which resembled a motorboat engine. It was an otter. The chain holding the windsock at the Alexander Bay aerodrome, rattling like a sieve, kept many police patrols

searching for hours. After such experiences they welcome a genuine raid.

The strain on the police is considerable, and men serve no longer than twelve months before being transferred to more pleasant duties. Night work, month after month, preys on the nerves. Many a young constable has developed that wretched mental conditions known in the French Foreign Legion as "cafard", and on the diamond coast as "Namaqualand Tap".

Single men only is the police rule to minimise the hardship. Everything possible has been done to make life tolerable within the barbedwire, but the fogs, the storms of driven, biting sand, varied only by burning sunshine, produce one of the least desirable climates in the world.

The monotony was broken on one occasion by a small steamer which prowled around the Orange River mouth for days. Once before a ship had visited these waters with divers on board to test the theory that the sea floor was littered with diamonds. Even prospecting in the sea is forbidden, and the little ship's movements caused a stir of expectation. Every landing place was

watched. Scores of fieldglasses were turned on the steamer. But she steered away after a few days, and presently the police received an answer to their urgent telegram reporting the "poacher". The mysterious steamer was the Union Government survey ship *Africana*, and she had been charting a new sandbank caused by Orange River floods.

A private aeroplane, a fishing boat close inshore, the flash of a motorcar's headlights, or a Hottentot's tale of strangers near the forbidden zone - any one of these will start the guardians of the diamond coast rushing from point to point in their fleet of cars while telephones spread the warning. Then the tingle of excitement dies down. Week follows weary week, and the buried millions of the coast lie undisturbed by even a rumour of a raid.

Alexander Bay is now a self-contained town, hemmed in by twelve miles of barbedwire entanglements, and protected further by a "no man's land" stretching to the outer fence. Hundreds of diggers are employed by the Government at Alexander Bay. The size of the

police force is a secret, but I am sure it is large enough to hold the fort against an attacking army.

"Little London" they call Alexander Bay, for at night the electric display and the searchlights throw into the sky a white glare which can be seen many miles away. And that is all the ordinary citizen can see of the State diggings. Nothing but a letter signed by the Minister of Mines will procure admission even into the "no man's land". A visiting police officer in uniform, lacking a pass, was turned away; for, as the sentry pointed out, the officer might have been a raider in disguise.

When a digger enters Alexander Bay for the six months' period of work he is searched. A man who arrived with a large sum of money would have to explain it; money buys diamonds. The pick-and-shovel men working in the gravel trenches are not permitted to touch a diamond. Everything must go into the cocopans, which transport the gravel to the washing plant. The men wear a special pocketless uniform, which

they must leave in the changing room while they walk naked to the bathrooms.

These and other precautions have eliminated every risk of loss except that of the human ostrich. The wellknown Kimberley method of preventing thefts by swallowing would not be tolerated by white diggers, so for some years past an X-ray plant has been in use. Every digger passing out on leave is photographed.

Sometimes the exiles of Alexander Bay amuse themselves by suggesting undiscovered methods of diamond smuggling. The carrier-pigeon idea was a good one, save for the fact that no man could stand a chance of entering the gates with a pigeon in his luggage. I think the story of the coffinload of diamonds must have been another local invention. What happened to the body?

One of the best stories of the early Alexander Bay smugglers, at a time when much ingenuity went undetected, has never been told. It concerns a digger who entertained his comrades with the music of a zither. This man obtained permission to send his zither home as it had developed a

fault. "Dear wife," he wrote, "please keep this zither as I am coming home on leave next month and I will have it repaired then."

His wife, however, could not bear the thought of the lonely digger enduring nights without music. She had the zither repaired immediately, and returned it - with the diamonds still inside.

More recently a carpenter applied for leave to take his tools away with him, as he might have some odd jobs to do during his holiday. The tools were examined minutely, and diamonds worth £15,000 were found, not inside the wooden handles but in the hollowedout metal of the tools. I believe the X-ray specialist played a part in that episode.

Liquor is a forbidden luxury, and the fine of £100 for attempting to smuggle it ensures a community of teetotallers. Good meals, books, billiards, cards, sport and concerts help to fill in the time. Nevertheless, the best view of Alexander Bay is the sight of the barbedwire vanishing behind a car bound for Port Nolloth and freedom.

One relic of the illicit diamond boom in Namaqualand remains. That is the trade in "schlenters ", bits of glass shaped roughly from bottle stoppers to resemble diamonds. They have none of the peculiar soapy feel of the genuine diamond, but they pass muster sometimes in a hurried deal at night, when an inexperienced newcomer pays cash for the worthless fragments. Genuine diamonds are seldom seen in Namaqualand outside the State area. Aladdin's Cave has been closed, and today no one but a fool would dream of trying to open the door.

Diamond smuggling was revived for a short period in 1944, when prices rose owing to wartime needs and certain people inside the barbedwire fence at Alexander Bay were tempted.

It was said that diamonds worth millions had reached Johannesburg from Namaqualand, and that a "master mind" controlling the whole enterprise was sending huge parcels to the Middle East by air. In Cairo, according to the story, enemy agents forwarded the diamonds through Turkey to Germany. Certainly there

were serious leakages at that period. The police recovered hundreds of the typical Alexander Bay stones from the illicit diamond market, and many arrests were made. A Portuguese subject, found in possession of diamonds worth £4,000, was deported. Some diamonds may have reached Germany through neutral countries; but the affair was greatly exaggerated. I cannot tell the full story. The Commissioner of Police summed it up very well when he reported that "diamonds were being illegally handled by persons who ought to have known better".

One of the best Alexander Bay stories in recent years arose out of the visit of an official to the camp. The official travelled in his own motorcar, and while he was attending to his duties someone hid a parcel of diamonds in the petrol tank. After a few days the official left the camp without being searched and drove back to Pretoria. The unorthodox smuggler secured leave, went to Pretoria, found the official's car and extracted the diamonds. Steps have now been taken to close this loophole. I have no doubt that from time to time human ingenuity

will find ways of defeating the system, but it will not be easy.

Port Nolloth does not reflect the wealth that has been found along the Namaqualand beaches. I can almost believe the story of the American valuator, sent there by a copper company, who reported that there was not a building in the place worth more than a shilling.

These glaring tin shacks, rusting in sun and fog, these sandy streets have known many sudden changes of fortune since the old copper companies turned the little fishing outpost into a miniature railway depot and harbour. Port Nolloth has echoed the wild songs of a horde of thirsty Cornish miners; sorrowfully the place watched them depart, generations later, when the mines closed down. Here, in native rebellions and greater wars, transports have landed men and guns. On this windswept shore desperate crowds have gathered to denounce the Government that seized the newly found diamonds. Now, out of this past with all its memories of wealth, there remains little but hunger and thirst.

Stand on the wharf among the rusty cranes and you will hear a bell buoy tolling on the harbour bar. It is sounding midnight for Cinderella - and Cinderella will not go. Like cats prowling round an empty house, hundreds of starved coloured people cling to the fragments of a lost prosperity. These people have seen the end of the copper boom, the closing of the diamond areas, the vicissitudes of the fishing industry. They must pay not only for food, but for fresh water - a penny a bucket, brought by rail from a well five miles away. Yet some survive and no doubt hope for better days. They tell a true story of one of the wells that supplies Port Nolloth with water. It is a mere hole by the roadside, and a passing motorist stopped there to fill his radiator. A coloured man helped him. There was enough water, said the man, to fill one paraffin tin every three hours. The motorist peered into the well and spied an enormous frog. "That's a good frog," declared the coloured man. "It has been there for four years, keeping the water pure. Before we got the frog, the water made people sick." Such is Port Nolloth's filtration plant. A

bath at the hotel costs half a crown on week days, but on Sundays you can enjoy a hot bath free. No frog is required for the bath water.

Rainfall is about an inch a year. Another peculiarity of the climate is found in the temperature, for Port Nolloth is often hotter in winter than in summer. This is due to summer fogs, and the scorching east winds which blow from the desert in winter.

Mr. William Carstens was my guide to Port Nolloth. His father had been the port superintendent in the early days; his sons were brought up there. Port Nolloth without a member of the Cornish family of Carstens would be like London without a Cockney. When Mr. Carstens looked out across the white surf and the dark rocks fringing the harbour, he saw more than the birds on Robbe Islet and the idle barges swaying at their moorings. The sea was a blue screen alive with the procession of ships and men.

Commander Nolloth, R.N., surveying the Namaqualand coast in H.M.S. Frolic, discovered this reefsheltered but uneasy harbour in 1854. Away in the copper mountains inland the

Cornish miners were breaking out the ore and sending it in wagons to Hondeklip Bay. Port Nolloth offered better facilities for shipment. Mules and oxen drew the little trucks; then came the railway, and thousands of tons of copper passed through Port Nolloth to the lighters and the sailing ships at anchor offshore.

A fleet of famous Cape brigs and schooners brought stores to Port Nolloth in those days - the Knysna Belle, Florence, Gem and other vessels which Captain Carstens had commanded before he settled down on shore. There were two rival coasting steamers bearing the same name; the "Big" Namaqua, which had to lie out in the bay when discharging cargo, and the "Little" Namaqua, which was able to make fast to the wharf.

Fine seamanship brought most of the Liverpool barques safely over the bar to load their copper. But there were wrecks which Mr. Carstens remembers well - tragic wrecks such as that of the barque Gleam in 1882.

"Several vessels were sailing into the harbour and the master of the Gleam was in a hurry to get

ahead of them," recalled Mr. Carstens." She let go her anchors too soon and started to drag. My father sent a tug to her assistance, but the master refused help. As the Gleam's anchor was raised, the chain parted and the barque drifted slowly on to Black Jacob Rock. Five minutes passed, with all Port Nolloth watching, and then there was nothing left of the Gleam but broken spars and timber on the beach. We thought her crew had gone down with her but four survivors were found later on Robbe Islet."

Men in blue jerseys still sit with their pipes on the Port Nolloth wharf, gazing at the bar, waiting for the coasters, still talking over old disasters; the loss of the schooner Flying Fish, with her cargo of mules; the brigantine, Rosaland, with railway material; the barque Ocean King, and others that are remembered while the strong south winds blow.

On several occasions Port Nolloth has had its own newspapers. An early venture, the "Busy Bee ", was shut down by the all-powerful Superintendent of the Cape Copper Company when it became too critical. After that came the

more sedate "Port Nolloth Times ", and finally the "North-Western Provinces Courier".

There was work for all Namaqualand in the railway construction days. As far back as 1870 an official report stated that Port Nolloth had a population of 200 people, three canteens, but no magistrate or gaol. Sailors, miners and railway gangs held their revels on the waterfront that is so desolate today. East winds and clammy fogs were forgotten in wild carousals.

" There are in Port Nolloth many descendants of some of the best English and Cape families who have been left stranded," a resident told me. That sentence sums up the tragedy of the vanished glory of Port Nolloth. Contrast present decay with the copper boom. Though the boom collapsed, a few sound companies survived; and the Cape Copper Company, during a life of just over half a century, returned more than £4,500,000 to the shareholders - 483 per cent. of the issued capital.

Years ago a skeleton pile of tram rails served as lighthouse. Now there is a slender tower of modern design, with an explosive signal every

fifteen minutes in foggy weather. This warning and the tolling of the fog bell are the typical sounds of Port Nolloth.

You can see the whole place in a ten minute's walk. The main street runs along the loose, sandy beach, and at the north end of this wooden-boarded boulevard are the residences, once smart enough, built by the Cape Copper Company for their officials. South are the port offices with a great white flagstaff where few flags are needed now; the hotels and store, post office, bank and church. Ghastly little slums of tin and sack huts crouch in the sand behind the village.

If rumours of wealth could support a town, Port Nolloth would be rich indeed. An old Hottentot used to visit the place at intervals of months, bringing nuggets of gold to barter for wine, tobacco, and groceries. Traces of gold had previously been found by geologists in the Richtersveld Mountains but nowhere in payable quantities. Attempts were made to bribe the Hottentot to reveal the source of his gold. The old man became less talkative as he drank. They tried to track him, and lost the trail. Now he

comes to Port Nolloth no more. He is dead and the secret which might have turned Port Nolloth into a little Johannesburg has died with him.

It was typical of ill-omened Port Nolloth that when the great diamond hoard of Alexander Bay was discovered the lucky strike did not enrich the people who had lived precariously on the desert edge so long. The "abandoned child of the copper boom ", as Port Nolloth has been called, caught some of the scraps - that was all. Those who had made fortunes and spent them relapsed into their old poverty.

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CHAPTER 10

DIAMOND ROAD

They call it the "Diamond Road" nowadays, but it was a treasure trail centuries before the first diamond was found in South Africa. It is the road that leads northwards from Cape Town, never very far from the coast, for five hundred miles through the hot wastes of Namaqualand to its end on the banks of the mighty Orange River.

I have driven along some of the world's famous highways, the Grand Trunk Road, the desert road from Alexandria, the Great North Road; and I know many African safari paths and caravan routes, staked out with skeletons and the memories of bygone adventurers. But this Diamond Road, the oldest road in South Africa, grips me most firmly of all and I never tire of following it into the wilderness.

When I first went that way in 1925 there were rumours of diamonds on the Namaqualand coast, but Kimberley was still without a rival. I planned the journey because I had been reading of the expedition sent up there by the Dutch East India Company in the very early days of the Cape - men in armour with oxwagons and coaches seeking "Vigiti Magna ", the legendary city in the golden land of Monomotapa. These tough old Hollanders and Danes left their marks on the walls of caves. I wanted to see how much of the old Namaqualand remained; for in such a remote district it is possible to recapture the frontier spirit and find traces of the "lone grey company before the pioneers". I have driven along the

Diamond Road on many different missions since then; but always the men in armour ride beside me ... Pieter van Meerhof, Olof Bergh, Jan Dankaert and the rest. Even when I fly over those empty wastes I can still see them with their muskets, their gifts of tobacco and beads for the Hottentots, their brave cavalcade of packoxen and wagons.

Diamond Road it has been called only since 1927, when the stupendous discovery was made at the mouth of the Orange River. This, as I shall tell, became the road along which illicit prospectors and smugglers raced with their loot; the road taken by the police in pursuit; the road of hundreds of diamond dramas. It is often a grim story, but you cannot have such wealth lying about unguarded on the long beaches without finding men willing to take any risk for the sake of quick and easy fortunes.

The road starts near the edge of Table Bay and passes almost immediately into the wheat belt, the Swartland which supplies all South Africa with bread. In the spring it is like travelling through a vast, undulating green sea.

About fifty miles from Cape Town you sight a mountain shaped like a castle - Riebeeck Kasteel, last outpost of the Dutch East India Company in the late seventeenth century. General Smuts was born in the shadow of that mountain. I was there one day when the signal cannon, which had been rusting on the mountain top for more than two centuries, was hauled down to the village of Riebeeck Kasteel to be set up as an historic monument. Early settlers lived in constant danger of attack by Bushmen, and the cannon was their link with the Castle in Cape Town. A signal shot was relayed from other hill-tops. Similarly, when a fleet of ships arrived in Table Bay all the cannons boomed out, and the farmers in the north set out to sell their cattle.

Van Meerhof's journal mentions the lions and rhinos, zebras and ostriches encountered by his expedition. Today you will seek big game in vain. A few buck remain, jealously guarded; and there are wild duck to be shot on the vleis. Only in the farm names are the great beasts still to be seen, farms called after elephant, eland, hippo

and rietbok in combination with vlei, fontein, kop and kloof.

The plains of wheat end a hundred miles from Cape Town, and the road climbs steeply over the Grey's Pass gap in the Olifants mountains. I slept one night at the foot of the pass, at an old outspan used by generations of wagon folk. It was peaceful after the city, with the frogs and a farm hand's guitar as the only sounds. I remember meeting a travelling watchmaker there - an elderly Hollander who confided to me for no reason at all that he was a bit lazy, and preferred wandering between the villages to settling down anywhere as a highly respected tradesman. The outspan is called The Rest, and under the gum trees I found another of those old cannon bearing the marks of the Dutch East India Company.

Over the pass the Diamond Road crosses the Olifants River and runs northwards through a sweltering valley of oranges. Some of the oldest orange trees in the world grow in this valley. I know a hospitable farm, owned by one family for more than two centuries, where a few of the

original trees are still bearing. These trees are older than any in California.

To the right of the road, for many miles now, run the peaks of the Cedarberg range. They have names like Sneeuwkop and Wolfberg, Great Krakadouw and Arch Peak; and although the six-thousand feet peaks can be seen from Table Mountain on clear days, only a few climbers have tackled them. There is, indeed, a "lost world" in the Cedarberg, and the whole area is so little known that I believe there is still some doubt about the heights of the peaks. I have met adventurous bands of coloured men who spend months in the recesses of the mountains gathering buchu, the wild plant which has a great reputation in South Africa as a cure for almost every ailment. Nowadays it is shipped in large quantities to the United States, and the collectors have to climb ever higher to discover the remote kloofs and ledges where the peppermint-flavoured leaves still grow. They bring in sacks of bush tea, too, the beverage of the old Bushmen and Hottentots, and famous for the relief it gives to asthmatics. Such men leave no

records, however, and the Cedarberg must still hold many secrets.

Sir Thomas Maclear, the Cape surveyor, did some climbing in these mountains more than a century ago and found himself baffled by the difficult rock work of one ascent. At the end of last century Professor E. H. L. Schwarz (of Kalahari "rainmaking" fame) continued the survey and explored a number of Bushman caves. He was the discoverer of a gorgeous painting which depicted an entire buck hunt. Another cave was visited in recent years by Dr. K. H. Barnard of the South African Museum, and "Wilton culture" implements were excavated. There must be many more haunts of the little Bushmen, however, which have been left untrodden since the Bushmen departed. A few Boer War blockhouses are still to be seen at strategic points; and a forgotten wagon track called "Ou Kaapse Weg", once the main route between Cape Town and Calvinia, winds marvellously between the fantastic rock formations in the south. Jackals and leopards are common enough in the wild Cedarberg kloofs.

The few farmers are men who love freedom and solitude. Cedars, which give their name to the range, are found always above the four thousand feet mark, which is the winter snowline. From there to five thousand feet the gnarled and contorted cedars grow well, though many have been destroyed in bush fires.

I left the Diamond Road one day and drove over incredible, precipitous paths to a great bowl in the Cedarberg where the Wupperthal mission is situated. Here indeed they might have filmed "Lost Horizon". The final descent was so steep that I wondered whether my car would ever climb out again. Wupperthal, founded more than a century ago as a settlement for freed slaves, is a world apart, a happy little self-contained world. There the Rhenish missionaries not only grow all the food their people need; but they make leather and export velskoens by the thousand. Their tobacco, rolled up in the Boer manner, is of heroic strength. All this in a summer temperature which often rises to 113 degrees in the shade.

The snows of the Cedarberg feed the Olifants River, a stream of pleasant memories for me.

Van Meerhof recorded that his men fished in the Olifants and caught as many fine carp as they could carry. The Olifants has been rediscovered by anglers in recent years; and the waters have been stocked with black bass. Only in the Olifants will you find the yellow fish (*Barbus capensis*), which puts up a great fight when hooked on a fly rod.

There, too, is the sandfish which migrates at spawning time - a sight as remarkable as a salmon run in Canada. All through a long summer afternoon I have watched these fish leaping upstream in thousands and trying to clear a waterfall. Only one in hundreds reached the pool above. Many fell into dry rocky potholes beside the falls and lay helpless under the sun.

Van Meerhof, the old rascal, gravely reported that he had seen a "living monster" in this river - a queer creature with three heads like cats' heads, and three long tails showing above the water. The Hottentots have a legend that many of their tribe were once devoured by an amphibious animal with three legs. I saw no such thing, and I am doubtful about van Meerhof.

The river banks are as full of life as the river. You may see an eagle hovering over a very small baboon, with the old baboons barking angrily. Rocketbursts of birds fly out from the palmiet and the willows - wild geese, wild ducks and brilliant kingfishers. Always there are the hamerkops seeking frogs and then returning to the enormous nests which often collapse under their own weight. The Olifants now has two lakes formed by the irrigation barrages in its course. One of these storage dams has covered the old road I followed on my first journey into Namaqualand. Irrigation furrows have brought prosperity to settlements fifty miles away. One farmer I met in the boom period of 1945 had just sold his tomatoes, grown in one year on four acres of rich silt, for a thousand pounds.

Near the northern end of the Cedarberg range stands Clanwilliam, once a settlement of Irish Protestants. Sunshine in which it is possible to bake eggs was too much for them, and all but one family sought a more kindly climate. It is an unspoilt village with old, thatched, gabled houses looking out across the Jan Dissel's River, which

irrigates the gardens. I have picked my own orange for breakfast at Clanwilliam; and when I am driving to the end of the Diamond Road I like to linger there for refreshment. After Clanwilliam comes a far more austere scene.

If you branch off to the left beyond Clanwilliam and drive into the Sandveld for forty miles you will see the cave in which many famous old travellers found shelter and carved their names - K.. J. Slotsboo in 1712, Vaillant the French explorer in 1783, Barnabas Shaw the missionary in 1816. The cave is called Heerenlogement (Gentlemen's Lodging). There is a spring close by, and Vaillant noted a large milkwood tree growing out of a rocky crevice. The tree still survives.

The Diamond Road enters Namaqualand at the Doorn River bridge. On my first journey the bridge was down, washed away by floods. I saw a hundred yards of soft, glaring white sand and a broad, shallow river; and as I stood there gaping a small boy appeared. He shared my lunch of tinned salmon, then waved vigorously. Out of the shimmering heat he conjured a team of

donkeys. He hitched chains to the axle of my feeble old car, took charge of the whole procession, and brought me safely through the water. On the far bank, which was steep, the donkeys faltered. I helped them with the engine and thus came triumphantly to the first Namaqualand farmhouse I had seen. The mud walls of that primitive dwelling remind me of the river crossing every time I drive over the new steel Doorn River bridge into Namaqualand, land of diamonds and poverty.

Namaqualand inspired W. C. Scully, the South African author and poet, who spent years there as a magistrate. He lived to the age of eighty-eight, and when I visited him on his eightieth birthday he told me: "I found my spiritual home in those dry, wide spaces in the days of the trek boers and the springbok migrations. The books I wrote with that territory as the background gave me the greatest pleasure."

Scully called Namaqualand "a land of deathful sleep". Whenever I read that poem I can see the aching distances again, the baked mud

pans, mirage and lightning and dustdevil; and in his words I can hear the "twaa grass" crackling in the wind.

*A land of deathful sleep, when fitful dreams
Of hurrying spring scarce wake swift fading
flowers;*

*A land of fleckless sky, and sheer shed beams
Of sun and stars through day's and dark's slow
hours;*

*A land where sand has choked once fluent
streams –*

*Where grassless plains lie girt by granite
towers.*

Two hundred miles from Cape Town the Diamond Road dips towards one of those sand-choked rivers and runs into the first Namaqualand village. This is Van Rhynsdorp, scene of many a diamond drama. At the height of the diamond smuggling boom, there was always a row of French champagne bottles in the village bar. Van Rhynsdorp is the centre of a hard-bitten, droughtstricken sheep district. Those bottles were not there to celebrate the coming of

rain. Corks popped often enough under the noses of the police when illicit diamond buyers and raiders had done their business undetected.

In those desperate days every stranger was suspect, and every other man you met was a policeman in plain clothes. Back in 1928, when the LD.B. v. C.LD. battle was at its height, my innocent car was searched while I slept. A large-scale buyer was known to have brought a valuable "parcel" into the hotel. The police never found it, but I heard long afterwards where it had been hidden. It was on top of the wardrobe in the room occupied by two detectives.

Often the raiders had to bury their tobacco bags and treacletins of diamonds beside the Diamond Road. That was when they knew they were being pursued, and dared not enter a village for fear of capture. Van Rhynsdorp occupies a strategic position in Namaqualand; it stands at a crossroads, and gives the illicit dealer a choice of routes and a chance of escape. The veld round Van Rhynsdorp is pockmarked with the temporary hiding places of diamond hoards. Many a buried "parcel" still lies where it was

left, for in emergencies at night the dealers sometimes lost their bearings.

To the north of Van Rhynsdorp, where the Diamond Road runs, stretches a notorious wasteland called the Knersvlakte, which may be translated as "the plain of the Gnashing Teeth". And indeed I found the name appropriate on my first journey, for I lost my way there, struggled for hours in the sand, and finally broke the crankshaft. A picture from that day of trial lingers in my mind. I had been sweeping the koppies and razorbacked ridges and salt pans with my fieldglasses, seeking help. I saw sheep at last, and a coppercoloured shepherd; and he led me to a farm. It was typical of the poverty of Namaqualand. Here were white people living in a "matjieshuis" - a hut shaped like an Eskimo's igloo, covered with rush mats, nothing more than a comfortless Hottentot shelter. The farmer had a young wife and family; a lean dog and a white cat shared the mud floor with them. All their water was brackish, so that it gave the tea and goatsmilk a salty flavour. I gathered that these people had known better times, but they had

been living in this desolation for several years. Some years later I was out searching for a recordbreaking airman, bound from London to the Cape, who had made a forced landing on the Knersvlakte. I lost my way again, and came in due course to the same farm. There was the airman, and the same helpful farmer. Nothing had changed.

Northwards once more, and the Diamond Road passes the tinroofed villages of Bitterfontein, railhead 290 miles from Cape Town. Bitterfontein's only claim to fame rests on a great diamond robbery. Many a time I have refreshed myself at the mahogany counter where this coup was planned.

It was in May 1931 that a registered packet containing diamonds worth £80,000 was taken one night from the little wood and - iron post office at Bitterfontein. The output from the government diamond diggings at the mouth of the Orange River has always been flown to Cape Town, and never has a stone been lost. This packet came from Kleinzee, the rich, privately owned diamond crater on the coast. The police

worked on the case for more than a year. The head of the Diamond Detective Department travelled more than 18,000 miles, following clues; but the thieves travelled further, and no one was ever convicted.

Within an hour after leaving Bitterfontein the Diamond Road wriggles into the blue Kamiesberg mountains. At five thousand feet you see the Leliefontein mission, and the thatched mud church built in 1816 by South Africa's first Wesleyan minister, the celebrated Rev. Barnabas Shaw. It took Shaw six weeks by oxwagon to reach this spot where he preached to the Hottentots. Now you can cover the ground in a day - thanks to fast cars and the Diamond Road.

Beyond the mission, at a high point of the great range, stands a village with a story - Kamieskroon, named after the enormous crown of rock on the mountain above. Kamieskroon is there because of the wisdom of the "Lion of Namaqualand ", one of the most remarkable men this strange country has produced. His name is Willem P. Steenkamp, and he is a doctor both of

theology and medicine. I like to think of him as I first saw him, riding across the veld of Namaqualand on a superb Arab horse; a huge, powerful man with a widebrimmed hat, a strong, clean-shaven face and a most determined jaw.

Dr. Steenkamp was born in this grim corner of South Africa. Early this century he studied theology at Glasgow and Amsterdam, securing his degree with the first scientific thesis written in Afrikaans. The Dutch Reformed Church, already aware of his brains and personality, would have given him a city congregation; but he chose to return to Namaqualand and labour for years in the wilderness. He was an inspired preacher. Later in his career many regarded him as the most effective speaker in the Union House of Assembly. In Namaqualand he was looked upon as a prophet, his advice was followed blindly. Dr. Steenkamp is Namaqualand.

He can still a hall anywhere in South Africa. His deep voice, his flowery Afrikaans, has a magic quality. When he found a little congregation crushed under a debt of £12,500, he set to work and wiped it out in a few years.

Wherever he preached, a stately church arose. One of his Namaqualand congregations lived in a dark hollow in the mountains called Bowesdorp. There was a church, a store, an hotel and a number of houses. Dr. Steenkamp decided that Bowesdorp was unhealthy, and that was the end of Bowesdorp. The whole village moved up into the sunshine to Kamieskroon.

After years as a predikant Dr. Steenkamp was able to satisfy an old ambition. He went to Louisville University, Kentucky, and qualified as a doctor of medicine. His son went through the course with him. Father and son then continued their medical studies in Holland, Austria and London, and finally set up in practice together in Cape Town. They are both redoubtable big game hunters and they have gone as far as Kilimanjaro with their unerring rifles.

Many a lion has fallen before the "Lion of Namaqualand". I met his son in Angola, on the trail of the most dangerous beast of all, the buffalo. A few years later I met the son again in the Western Desert. He had the late Duke of Aosta's elephant gun as a souvenir of Abyssinia.

The Steenkamps believe in packing several careers into their lifetime. In his old age, the "Lion" returned to Namaqualand to farm in the most remote part of that dry territory. Now you will understand why I halted for a few moments at Kamieskroon to pay tribute to a prophet.

Dr. Steenkamp told me stories of this waterless country which indeed revealed sermons in stones. One concerned a lonely place called Penssleep (Afrikaans: "bellycrawl") where the only spring within seventy miles is found. To reach the water you crawl on your stomach through a narrow crevice in the rock, let down your hat as far as you can stretch your arm, and scoop up the water.

Then there is Besondermeid ("remarkable girl"), another remote spot where an early trekboer with his wife and daughter were surrounded by hostile Hottentots. Feasting on the trekboer's oxen, the Hottentots left the killing of the white people until the end of the revelry. The trekboer awaited his chance. When the meatgorged Hottentots grew weary of dancing, he reached out for his old muzzleloader and fired into the

herd of oxen. The shot caused a stampede, and most of the Hottentots ran after the oxen. The trekboer then fired at the remaining Hottentots, with his daughter standing calmly at his side helping him to load. Very soon there was not a living Hottentot in sight. One man, and a remarkable girl, had routed a horde.

Namaqualand is full of odd place names. Another, not far from the Diamond Road, is Geselskapbank ("conversation seat"), a flat rock covering nearly two acres. The surface contains a number of potholes, so that when the rare rains fall, water is collected. For this reason Geselskapbank has long been an outspan for the trekboers, a place of reunion after months or years for the people who wander across the brown face of Namaqualand with their sheep in search of grass. Geselskapbank, however, was a much older Hottentot name - Hau Iuis ("shouting rock"). It seems that two Hottentot leaders once met there as enemies. Afraid to open battle, they contented themselves by shouting insults across the rock.

Now there is a little town athwart the Diamond Road. It is Springbok, "capital" of the 26,000 square miles of Namaqualand. Governor Simon van der Stel toiled up here from the Cape with his retinue in 1685, leaving his name and the date carved at the entrance to the shaft he sunk, with the aid of gunpowder, in the Copper Mountain. The log of his expedition, lost for two and a half centuries, was discovered in the library of Trinity College, Dublin.

Van der Stel found copper ore, but until the middle of last century Springbok remained a mere huddle of Hottentot mathuts. Then came the copper boom and the Cornish miners. The landscape must have staggered them. This is a country of immense boulders; some, like Geselskapbank, resting alone on sandy plains; others piled high, thousands upon thousands of them, in fantastic disorder. Then there are the duststorms. I will admit that a Western Desert sandstorm is more devastating, but not much more. In this copper country, when a duststorm comes, it is an eclipse. The sun disappears, windows and doors are bolted, lamps are lit.

Nevertheless the Cornishmen endured these hardships and many more for seventy years. From the harsh koppies of Namaqualand they extracted copper worth twenty million pounds. They also left behind them the Cornish fondness for tea. In coffeedrinking South Africa, this remote corner clings to tea at all hours of the day. Even the Hottentots prefer it.

Follow the road to the O'Okiep mine, five miles from Springbok, and I will try to convey a weird experience of my first visit in 1925. At that time the O'Okiep mine had been closed down for six years. Copper had collapsed soon after the armistice. They were keeping the pumps going, but the streets of rusty, corrugated iron houses were empty, and only a few half-starved Hottentots hung about the place like cats round an abandoned home.

It was eerie. I wandered across to the three deserted churches. One of the men at the pit-head pointed out the bulletmarks on some of the doorways; marks left untouched since the siege of O'Okiep during the Boer War. "They tried to send a trainload of dynamite into the settlement

one night," chuckled the pumpman. "It would have wrecked the place - only we had pulled up the line the night before!"

I saw the old cricket pavilion and the grassless field where famous players once patted their bats on matting and hard red gravel. Salt bush was growing over it. I thought of the race meetings, the polo, the brass bands, the amateur theatricals, when there were two thousand men at O'Okiep and copper was precious. Then I noticed that the club was open, the old building of ornamented tin reserved for mine officials.

On that October afternoon in 1925 the club had just six members - six of all the hundreds who had gathered there for a farewell drink when the mine closed down. The superintendent and a tiny staff had been kept there by the company in the hope that copper would rise again. In the Victorian rooms of the club lived the old O'Okiep with all its ghosts. Every detail had been left untouched. I stared at a large wall map of the Western Front, with every flag of 1918 precisely where it had been stuck on Armistice Day. From the mouldy leather chairs behind me I

seemed to hear faint, yet excited voices, critical echoes of the strategy of Foch and Byng. The clock had stopped in O'Okiep and I had gone back along the path of time.

The club library heightened the illusion. Books lend even more to atmosphere, I think, than furniture or pictures; and some of the dated volumes told the life story of the mine from start to finish. This library, I learned, was John Galsworthy's hobby. His father was the Cape Copper Company's solicitor, and as a young man Galsworthy visited O'Okiep as a guest of the company. He saw the need for books, and when he returned to London he acted for years as the club's literary adviser. All his own novels, published before 1919, were on the shelves.

I saw John Galsworthy's name in the visitors' book ... many famous names on tattered pages. Smuts and Botha had passed this way. On many a page I saw the signature of F. C. Cornell -- one of Namaqualand's most determined prospectors, and a gifted writer. I had met him only once, when I was a schoolboy and Fred Cornell had come to my father's office, to deliver a poem for

publication in the newspaper. But for me, Cornell has always embodied the adventurous spirit which leads men into the hot, unexplored wastes along the Orange River and far beyond. He wrote a book called "The Glamour of Prospecting", long out of print, for which collectors of Africana now pay high prices. Often he camped on the rich diamond terraces at the Orange River mouth; but in spite of a legend that he really discovered that hoard, I know that he was unaware of the fortune beneath him. Cornell, who had survived all the vicissitudes of a prospector's life, died after a motor accident in London. He was another of the daring men who travelled the Diamond Road.

O'Okiep was the scene of a queer "mining venture" during the 1914-18 war, when there was a bottle famine in South Africa. They still tell the story of the poor Hottentot who kicked up a bottle in the veld outside O'Okiep one day, took it to the storekeeper and received sixpence for it. He returned to the spot with a spade and uncovered what appeared to be an inexhaustible supply of bottles. For decades this had been the

burial ground of all the bottles emptied by thirsty Cornishmen. Then a new site was selected, and this "bottle mine" had been forgotten. Unwisely the Hottentot boasted of his good fortune. Claims were staked, partnerships formed, thousands of bottles came to the surface. Some were half a century old, but they fetched their price. The daily production of bottles must have begun to compete with the copper output. Then the supply failed, and careful prospecting revealed no more payable glass. O'Okiep, I must add, slumbered between the wars and came to life again soon after Munich. Other mines in the neighbourhood revived, thanks to American enterprise; and at the time of writing they are all flourishing. The coloured people of the district, who inherited not only a taste for tea but also many Cornish expressions, have now added American phrases to their speech. And last time I drove up the Diamond Road, all the hotels in the copper area were serving iced grapefruit at breakfast. That was something the Cornish miners never thought of ordering.

The road, when it leaves O'Okiep, turns at last towards the sea and the diamonds. Here and there it touches the route of one of Africa's oldest and queerest railways. They pulled up the track in 1945 for scrap metal; but once I rode from O'Okiep to Port Nolloth in the toy coaches and met Jack Meadows, the Cornishman who ran the line for more than thirty years. Travellers called it the "one man railway" at that period, for the service had been reduced to one train a week each way, and Jack Meadows was playing many parts. He sold me my ticket, saw the freight into the van, blew his whistle and then climbed on board as conductor. (In addition to these duties Jack Meadows became harbourmaster on arrival at Port Nolloth). Everything was in miniature along the ninety-two miles of the railway. There were even private coaches for high officials; queer little boxes of Victorian design with paintwork blistered by the Namaqualand sun.

Opened in 1876, the thirtyinch gauge line cost £1,000 a mile on the level, and about twice that sum in the mountains. Water was the great problem. The surveyors sank a well at one place

where they found a plant with long roots. They went down through sand and layers of hard-baked deposits; but at 124 ft. the bottom was as dry as the top. The roots went down further, but the surveyors gave up the task and searched elsewhere. The line pursues an erratic course, often of necessity, for there are fearsome drops between O'Okiep and the sea. It is said, too, that the contractor was paid by the mile and that some of the leisurely curves represent the extra profit he made. The ingenious engineers had to overcome a grade of one in nineteen at a spot called Dick's Cutting. Going down past Anenous, I remember, they broke the train up into sections, each one with a brakeman. This tiny railway rendered valiant service in two wars. It was used in the Boer War; and when Botha and Smuts invaded German South-West Africa in 1914, Jack Meadows had to run eight trains a day. Now it has carried its last load, and everything goes by road to the railhead at Bitterfontein.

One point touched by both railway and the Diamond Road is Steinkopf, an old mission

station and also the jumping-off place for the little-known Richtersveld. It was in the Richtersveld that Sir James Alexander worked copper more than a century ago, floating his ore down the Orange River in barges. Many believe the Richtersveld is a treasurehouse of undiscovered wealth. Dry little Steinkopf offers the traveller one *of* the finest collections of rare succulent plants in the world; those queer camouflaged stapelias, euphorbias, plants with leaves packed as tightly as a calendar; plants like cones, tortoises and pebbles; all collected by Meyer, the old missionary, whose name is famous among botanists. This is also the land *of* the kokerboom; the tree from which the Bushmen made their quivers. Even now you may find, beside a waterhole, a kokerboom with pegs driven into the trunk. That was the Bushman's way of escape when he saw a lion coming to drink. You will encounter no more Bushmen along the Diamond Road now. They have gone to vastnesses beyond the Orange River. But I remember one farm where, on my first journey, an aged Bushman still lingered. His name was

Koutab, and he made a wonderful shepherd. When sent to the nearest post office for letters, the farmer told me, Koutab would set off at a jogtrot at two o'clock in the morning, and return soon after sunset the same day. He had covered eighty miles with hardly a rest. Koutab had an appetite to match his powers of endurance. He could, eat half a steenbok at a sitting and sleep for thirty-six hours afterwards. He liked locusts and ants, too, but would not tackle baboons or spiders. To detect the presence of ants in a heap he would place a reed to his ear and listen. Koutab made bows and arrows. The poison, he declared, was a mixture of snake venom and plant juices. It is hard to estimate a Bushman's age, but the farmer told me that Koutab was a centenarian. He certainly looked it.

Hottentots you will see at many points along the Diamond Road - the Namaquas, known to the early Dutch settlers, as the "Chinese Hottentots". They have yellowish complexions and narrow eyes; and from these and other clues an interesting theory has been evolved. It has been established that Chinese traders sailed to

East Africa in junks centuries ago. There is a legend that a fleet of junks, blown off their course during a gale, were carried round the Cape of Good Hope and drifted northwards with the Benguella current. Wrecked near Port Nolloth, the Chinese mingled with the Hottentots and imparted the characteristics which are still observed today. Certain similarities of language have also been traced. As a Chinese junk sailed all the way to England from Canton in 1848, there is no reason why older junks should not have reached the Namaqualand coast. I find it fascinating to imagine the meeting between the two peoples long ago, while the batwinged junks with their painted eyes, brass carronades and decorated poops broke up on the rocky shore.

The Diamond Road enters dismal, often fog-covered, dune country near the coast, skirts the depressing settlement of Port Nolloth, and turns northward again on the last lap. Here I always think of the greatest animal story, one of the deepest mysteries, that Africa has ever known, for this desolate stretch of coast between Port Nolloth and the Orange River was the scene. The

event occurred before my time, yet when W. C. Scully described it to me the whole astounding spectacle rose before my eyes.

It is the winter of 1892 and the springbok are trekking westwards in millions across Bushmanland. Gordon Cumming and many other hunters have written of the springbok migrations; but this one is the strangest and most dramatic of all. Wave after living wave passes over the veld, myriads of hooves drumming, accompanied by another sound like a rushing wind. For miles the hard earth is torn up as though by ploughs. The springbok multitude approaches the mountains at the western edge of Bushmanland. Rain often falls here in winter; and here, after feeding on the new grass, the migrating springbok always turned and scattered.

This time the herds do not turn. They cross the mountains, still many millions strong, and pass on irresistibly towards the sea. Astonished families of trekboers watch them, and do not forget to fire into the moving mass. Almost every bullet brings down two, sometimes three, springbok. The herds dash on, leaping with lyre-

shaped horns down, bodies arched, legs stiff; raising snow-white blazes of hair on their backs as they rise ten feet into the air. Near the coast, on the wagon track that is later to become the Diamond Road, stands Scully the magistrate. He sees the advancing armies of springbok reach the shore at last and race on into the breakers. They drink the salt water, and soon they die. Countless thousands of springbok carcasses litter the beaches in one unbroken heap for thirty miles.

The lemmings of Norway are small fry compared with this mass suicide of the springbok. According to Scully, the mountains were very dry that year and the springboks failed to find grass. A springbok usually lives without drinking. On this occasion, however, they were in the grip of a raging thirst which could never be slaked, but which led them to the only water in their path. I think Scully was right, for it is on record that the migrating springbok sometimes dashed into the Orange River in the same way and drank the water. Only in 1892, apparently, did the great trek end in the sea. The stench from the carcasses became so appalling that everyone

near the scene had to move inland. The last trek on the grand scale occurred in 1896, and today there are not enough springbok in the whole of South Africa to present such a spectacle. Every migration was a massacre.

Our journey up the Diamond Road ends when a barbed wire fence appears, with a gate across the road. It is fifty miles from Port Nolloth to the end of the road at Alexander Bay diamond diggings; but the ordinary traveller may drive only a few miles up this road. If you are crafty or influential enough to pass the barrier you must travel on alone. The old Dutch explorers would not have approved of a "No Admission" sign on a heavy gate. I like the Diamond Road as I first saw it - sandy in stretches, often bumpy, but free as it was when Pieter van Meerhof made the first wheel tracks towards the distant land of Monomotapa.

BOOK TWO : BEYOND THE FRONTIER

CHAPTER 11

RETURN TO LUDERITZ

Through my porthole I can see the long white finger of a lighthouse against a brown and jagged desert coast. It is Diaz Point. I last made this landfall more than twenty years ago, and from the sea Luderitzbucht looks unchanged.

Only the Germans would have built on such a grand scale in this desperate place. Imagine a landscape so dry that every drop of drinking water must be condensed from the sea, and you have an idea of the desolation of Luderitzbucht. The town is set among loose dunes and tiers of sunscorched volcanic rock - a fantastic scene without a tree or a green bush within eight miles. This is a land of sand blast, one of the windiest coasts in the world. Violent south-west winds, raging almost incessantly for seven months of the year, drive the sand with such force that huge rocks are scored and honeycombed into queer shapes. These high winds create tremendous "dust devils", pillars of dust that gyrate across

country and often pass over the bay before collapsing in smoky swirls.

Yet this is also the wind that distributes the diamonds along hundreds of miles of coastline. This wind still uncovers layer after layer, throwing up wealth with roaring generosity.

Always there are the dunes. Great, crescent-shaped "barchan" dunes that cover the railway tracks and men who have died from thirst; cover and uncover them in a never-ending march. In Luderitzbucht you may hear many a tale of death in the dunes.

It was not always like this. Once there were flowers and palm forests in this wilderness. Now it is a petrified forest, and only the shapes of the lost flowers remain in stone.

Luderitz, the town, is not so grim, though it can never forget the surrounding desert for long. As I walked off the wooden jetty I think of the town I saw years ago ... streets deep in sand, streets where people once picked up diamonds; trolleylines everywhere, with mules hauling freight and passengers. One street, I recall, some humorist had named Under den Linden. Motor-

cars had not yet penetrated this strange outpost. Today there are taxicabs in Luderitz, and the streets are paved.

Near the waterfront is the water distilling plant on which life in Luderitz depends. Operated by the South African Railways, it converts 2,300 gallons of sea water into 1,300 gallons of fresh water every hour. The town's supply is pumped into tanks on the summit of a 200-ft. koppie called Diamantberg. Fresh water costs seven shillings for 100 gallons, and you can have a bath for 1s. 6d. at the hotels.

On the Diamantberg stands the finest house in Luderitz, a fine Teutonic mansion built when the German Crown Prince was expected to visit the territory. I believe it cost £8,000, and it was sold to the Union Government not so long ago for £1,200 as a residence for the magistrate. The garden is as remarkable as the house. You could stand and admire both of them in any suburb anywhere. People in Luderitz, despairing of the aching, sandy wilderness, have been known to send to Cape Town for earth to grow plants in tubs. The magistrate's garden, seen against the

parched Diamantberg, is the main wonder of Luderitz.

From a bench on the Diamantberg you can see many other houses built in the German time. Corrugated iron was "verboden" in those days except for sheds. Luderitz owes its solidity, its comfortable air of permanence to that law.

From here you can see the dead diamond fields at Kolmanskop, eight miles away, - with machinery that cost millions rusting in the sand. Down in the harbour are the crawfish cutters which help to maintain the town that has lost its diamond industry. Never again will Luderitz have its own Stock Exchange, with diamond shares worth millions of marks changing hands day after day.

Yet the diamonds are still there. Everywhere you go outside Luderitz are noticeboards marking areas which you cannot enter without a permit. They tell a true story of a vising school-teacher who went for a short walk on the edge of the town. She shook the sand out of her shoes when she returned. Out fell a diamond. The



This fine German mansion overlooking Luderitzbucht (built for the German Crown Prince) was sold to the Union Government recently for £1,200.

diamond company, however, has moved south and built a new, barricaded camp 150 miles away near the mouth of the Orange River. There are diamonds almost everywhere in this coastal desert, but the Orangemund terraces are the richest fields of all.

Still perched reflectively on the Diamantberg, I gaze across the town to Shark Island and remember another phase of German colonisation. The Germans who built so well on these barren shores also set up a local Belsen nearly forty years ago.

It is 1906, the year when the Hottentots rose in revolt. In the north the Hereros have already been decimated. Now the Hottentot prisoners are being driven into Luderitz, and Shark Island is their destination. The grim island lies so close to the town that today a causeway has been built so that you can walk from the mainland to the hospital on the island. There is no hospital for the beaten Hottentots. They arrive looking like skeletons, and they remain on the island without proper clothing, without blankets, often without rations or water. There, in 1906, they may be

seen starving to death - thousands of men, hundreds of women. Some escape at night by swimming, only to perish in the desert. A few hundred live to tell the tale of this Belsen in South-West Africa.

Two islands help to form the harbour at Luderitz. One is Shark, and beyond is Seal Island - a small hump of land with caves which are the legendary hiding places of a great pirate hoard. I know one man who dug the sand out of several caves and excavated several old bronze coins and a snuff box with the appearance of gold. He lost these interesting objects before they could be examined by experts; for when war came in 1914 the Germans seized his possessions and sent him to an internment camp. A few years before 1914 there was a British steam yacht, the Alfred Noble, in these waters. She was manned by Royal Navy officers on leave. Before they left, empty-handed, they announced that they had been seeking Captain Kidd's treasure.

Below my perch on the Diamantberg are the pleasant bathing boxes of the lagoon resort called Ostende. You find picturesque touches in

this weird desert. The hotel where I shall lunch is not a Masonic or Commercial, but the Europa Hof. I had marvellous coffee and peach cake in a cafe this morning. They have fresh milk, white bread, good meat and vegetables in this town, though the nearest farms are at Aus, eighty miles inland where the Namib ends. I am told that the gemsbok come down to the sea outside Luderitz, though I cannot explain how they live.

This old harbour of the Portuguese explorers has given shelter to pirates and gunrunners, American whalers, to many famous ships. For a long period, until the German occupation only sixty years ago, the place was a no man's land, a lawless little settlement where vivid characters lived and died. I must drive out to Diaz Point, for that is where the story begins.

On this rocky point I seem to see Bartholomew Diaz and his scurvystriken sailormen landing with the stone pillar they set up there in 1487. It is surmounted by an iron cross, and they call it the Pillar of Santhiago. The harbour they name Angra Pequena ("little bay")

and this name it retains until the German occupation.

Centuries after Diaz come reckless whaling and sealing crews. They discover the cross, but the civilised world knows nothing of it until 1833, when Captain Owen, R.N., reports it. By that time the pillar has been cast down and shattered, and the iron cross has vanished.

Such an act of vandalism might be easy to explain when drunken crews were on shore in a lawless harbour with nothing to do. But there is a queer tale which I have heard in half a dozen different forms connected with this Pillar of Santhiago. It is said that the tough sailormen of the whalers overturned the pillar to search for treasure buried beneath it.

Then there was the report of Captain Parker of the brig Kirkwood, who dug beneath the broken pillar, through a layer of bird guano, and excavated a deal box. "Upon opening the box a man with his arms across his heart and looking us full in the face was presented to our view," wrote Captain Parker. "The features betrayed an expression of terror. His garments were light and

his hands had not been used to hard work. We brought him and a portion of the cross to St. Helena."

The preservation of the body of this unknown man is explained by a peculiar property of the soil of the South-West African coast, which has an embalming effect. Probably the chemical constituents of the guano (phosphates) are responsible for this effect.

Why did Captain Parker explore the site of the Diaz cross? It seems plain that he was influenced by one of the many treasure legends that one still hears in Luderitzbucht; but the true details will never be known.

There were ghouls in those days, for a mummified body - possibly that which Captain Parker found - was shipped from South-West Africa to Liverpool, where it was exhibited as an "African Relic".

The fragment of the Diaz cross found by Captain Owen consisted of a marble base, round on one side and square, for the inscription, on the other; a block of hard, shelly limestone such as is found in Portugal; and a shaft six feet high.

Apparently there were two crosses - the iron one which was never found, and a stone cross of the same breadth and thickness as the shaft, with an inscription almost obliterated. The latter cross was seen by one of Captain Owen's officers.

Portions of the Pillar of Santhiago were brought to Cape Town in a guano schooner about the middle of last century and were set up in the shape of a cross at the entrance to the South African Museum.

Portugal made vigorous efforts to recover these relics of her famous men. Chevalier du Prat, Consul for Portugal in Cape Town in 1865, made a successful claim for the upper part of the Diaz cross, which was taken from the South African Museum to Lisbon. One of the original pieces remains in Cape Town. Another fragment was taken to New Zealand by Sir George Grey, a former Governor of the Cape.

In the Luderitz museum they have the complete skeleton of a negress. All the old Portuguese navigators captured native women and marooned them on distant shores, believing that women would be treated with more kindness

than men. They always intended to pick up these women, months or years later, and thus hear of new tribes and fresh sources of wealth. The skeleton in Luderitz is believed to be that of a West African woman who sailed with Diaz.

The old German lighthouse still stands at Diaz Point, but the modern foghorn, with its castellated turret in honour of the Portuguese discoverers, is of recent date. There is also a stone cross recording the landing of Diaz.

Diaz Point is only nine miles from Luderitz, but before, the rough motorroad was built it could be reached only by sea. No doubt there are a few South African soldiers still living who remember how they nearly starved to death there. They were on guard duty at the lighthouse soon after the Union occupation in 1914, and it seems that they were forgotten. Having eaten all their rations they hoisted a distress signal. A British cruiser sighted it and sent a boat to the rescue. The present keeper of the light can drive into town within twenty minutes. He has a great cage filled with canaries to keep him company. On the day of my visit, work had started on a

new house. Hard by Diaz Point you will see the sharp rocks of Halifax Island, a guano island. It is a small island, separated from the mainland by a narrow channel, so that you can watch the penguins waddling up to their burrows. Married men like to be stationed as headmen on Halifax, for it has none of the loneliness of the other guano isles of this desert coast. They can go to Luderitz for supplies, and send their children to school.

Halifax Island has its story, too. I have a vision of a white steam yacht anchored off the island. She is the Xema, chartered by Lord Fitzwilliam, a famous Irish treasurehunter. It is 1906, and the diamond rush has not yet started on these shores. Yet there are men in the Xema who know that diamonds are to be found in these sands.

How did they know? Some say that a shipwrecked crew took diamonds back to England with them; others tell you that a sailing ship loaded sand ballast at Luderitz and that diamonds were found in the sand. I have a letter, written in red ink, which explains that the secret

was revealed by a Cardiff shipmaster, Captain R. Jones, on his deathbed. He had filled a pickle-bottle with diamonds while loading guano at Halifax Island.

At all events, here is the Xema. Word of her mission has leaked out, and her master, Captain Temperley Grey, has been intercepted at sea by H.M.S. Terpsichore and warned against making a landing. But the Xema has a speed of sixteen knots. She has given the cruiser the slip, and now the men are on shore with spades.

Diamondiferous gravel is found on the island, the men are cheering - and then the Terpsichore heaves in sight again. This time she remains on guard until the frustrated Xema steams away to the south. Vigorous efforts are made in Cape Town by the Xema's charterers to secure a prospecting permit for the guano islands. Dr. Jameson, then Premier of the Cape Colony, hears their story but finally refuses to grant permission. Halifax Island is left to the penguins.

It is low tide, and I am able to wade across to a tiny islet between Halifax and the mainland. There is a grave on this islet, covered with

stones, and a board with a faint inscription. It is just possible to read a few words.

In Memory of George Pond
of London
August 1902
Aged 51
Died of Hunger
and Thirst.

From one source I learn that George Pond was a member of a guano gang on an island further down the coast. The water ran low in the tanks, and the supply ship was overdue. George Pond volunteered to march to Luderitz for help. He was found dead by the men on Halifax, but they guessed what had happened and sent a cutter to the waterless island - just in time.

That is one explanation. The other tale is even more grim. They say that George Pond was run out of Luderitz by the Germans, sent out mercilessly into the desert; and that he trudged towards Halifax Island to find shelter. The island headman found him too late, and buried him

with a board over the grave stating that George Pond had been abandoned by the people of Luderitz. When one board was pulled down, the headman patiently engraved another. Some of the words on the present board can no longer be deciphered. All that is certain is that poor George Pond died of hunger and thirst.

On the way back to Luderitz I visit Sturmvogel Bay and the ruins of a whaling station. Every bay on this coast seems to have been used by the Norwegian whale hunters at some time or another.

Here at Sturmvogel, where the flamingos stalk the beach, you can still see the cement slipway built in 1913, and corroded tanks still holding tons of whale oil. The pathos of desolation surrounds the abandoned factory. The Norwegians have left a Svend Foyn gun behind, complete with harpoon; and someone has mounted it neatly on a concrete base so that visitors may swivel it round and aim at imaginary whales. You wonder what tales of the sea were told oil that deserted beach, what bold and roving seamen once walked there. The

prefabricated wooden Norwegian house where the whalersmen lived is still in good repair. It has overhanging eaves, and parties of school children use it during their holidays.

My coaster sails at daybreak. I shall climb the Diamantberg again and try to recapture all those dramatic interludes which give the old harbour of Angra Pequena its rich background of history.

It is the middle of the last century, and already there are a few white traders and prospectors living in wooden shacks on these shores. One gave his name to Van Reenen's Cove. Hottentots arrive from the interior with cattle, ostrich feathers and the skins of wild animals.

Most famous of all the early settlers was David Radford, of Colchester, Essex. (There is a Redford's Bay on the charts, but I have the narrative from the man's daughter and the name should be spelt Radford.) When Radford arrived in 1861, the other white settlers had departed and there were only Hottentots and Bushmen on the beach.



“Died of hunger and thirst” — a grave on the desert coast of South-West Africa.

Radford made friends with the Bushmen, and they gave him venison, and fresh water from their ostrich egg shells. He rode an ox far into the Namib. A shipmaster sold him a whaleboat, and he caught sharks and boiled them down in the iron pots that still remain on the beach at Radford's Bay. He sent oil, sealskins and cattle to Cape Town by schooner, receiving trade goods in exchange. Often this lonely trader in no man's land was in danger, often he was robbed by the Hottentots. Yet he would not leave.

During a visit to Cape Town in 1878 Radford married a Miss Powell and took her back to Radford's Bay. While he was away inland trading, his wife ran the fishery, salted and smoked the catch. They employed three hunters to bring them game. There, in 1881, a daughter was born; and they had seven more children in their house beside the lagoon. "We were happy because it was a wild country and we were free," the eldest daughter told me. "I can still remember the sailing ships that called and the cargoes they landed."

By 1883, Radford had become a power in the land and owner of the bay where the town now stands. Herr F. A. Luderitz arrived, a Bremen merchant who had heard tales of copper in the desert. (All these early settlers were after copper, never dreaming of the diamonds lying all round them.) The following year Germany claimed the whole country, and a rusty cannon of unknown origin, bearing the date 1760, was fired to salute the annexation.

Radford, however, was not so easily dispossessed of his pioneer holdings. He took his claim to Berlin, and at last the German Government awarded him a life annuity and distributed 20,000 gold marks among his children. Not every adventurer fares so well.

Radford died in 1913, but a number of his descendants are still living in Cape Town and South-West Africa:

Luderitz, the newcomer, was an enterprising man, and there is reason to believe that he found diamonds long before the official discovery.

He made a daring trip down the coast in an open boat to the Orange River mouth, and it is

said that he crossed the bar and sailed up the river. On the return trip the boat capsized, and Luderitz was drowned.

The story of modern Luderitzbucht began in 1908, when a young German railwayman picked up a diamond and became a millionaire. August Stauch was his name. His gang of natives was shovelling sand off the newlylaid railway line when Stauch saw something glittering on a yellow dune. "Diamond, baas," remarked an intelligent coloured labourer, James Kolman, who had worked in the Kimberley mines. Stauch resigned from the railway service and pegged claims which proved to be marvellously rich. They were at Kolmanskop, the place named in honour of the coloured man who knew the difference between a piece of glass and a precious bluewhite crystal.

So now all this country beyond my perch on the Diamantberg is "Sperrgebiet", forbidden territory where police on camels and in cars are forever patrolling from waterhole to coast in search of fresh footprints.

Diamond raiders have come by air, land and sea into this land of the great thirst and riches. One man was caught with a miniature condensing plant strapped to his back so that he could survive with the sea as his only water supply. But as I gaze round this sinister landscape I am not tempted. Always there are the dunes.

Sunset, and my coaster will soon be putting up her riding lights. I can see her silhouetted against the gold of evening. Beyond, I seem to see an older and more famous ship - a man-'o-war with masts and yards and a small funnel. It is 1863, and Captain Semmes has brought the Alabama in here, beyond the reach of international law. The daring Confederate commerce raider has a prize in the bay, the Federal barque Sea Bride. Captain Semmes makes gifts to the Hottentots, sells the Sea Bride and her cargo to a Cape Town shipowner, and sails away from Angra Pequena to his fatal encounter with the Kearsage.

This is a strange corner of the world to sight the Russian flag, but before nightfall I have a last

vision. Admiral Rozhestvenski has found shelter here in 1904 for his doomed fleet ... the battleship Suvarov, the blackpainted cruisers, the colliers and store ships. He coals, takes some fresh meat. And he, too, leaves to keep an inevitable appointment, with Togo at Tsushima.

Night falls on the old harbour of Angra Pequena. Now there is the light on Diaz Point again and the dunes of death are covered by the kindly darkness. -:-

CHAPTER 12

WORLD OF SAND

Old harbour of the outlaws of a dozen nations, of American whalermen, ivory and cattle traders, hunters and slave dealers - that was Walvis Bay last century. Now it is a growing, modern seaport, the busiest place between Lobito Bay and Cape Town. The railway route across the Kalahari Desert has been surveyed. If the line to Rhodesia is built, Walvis Bay will become one of the great ports of the world, a rival in the meat

trade to Buenos Aires on the other side of the South Atlantic.

At present Walvis Bay seldom comes into the day's news. A huge refrigerating plant dominates the sandy harbour. Liners berth alongside modern wharves. Sleek railway coaches stand in the new station, ready to haul out on the long journey south to Cape Town. More than a century ago Captain Benjamin Morrell, the American seaman and explorer, found a race of friendly natives there "living in wigwams, shooting gulls with bow and arrow and spearing fish". Long after the middle of last century Walvis Bay was still a no man's land peopled by Portuguese, wandering Boer farmers, half-castes, raw Hottentots and men who had fled from more settled areas for reasons of their own.

Then, in 1878, came H.M.S. Industry with sailors who ran up the Union, Jack, fired their muzzleloading cannon and annexed Walvis Bay for Britain. Evidently stories of the wealth of the interior, rumours of gold and copper and other rich minerals, had reached London. But for many years Walvis Bay remained simply an outpost on

the desert coast of South-West Africa. Germany, having decided to colonise the hinterland, bitterly resented Britain's seizure of the only valuable harbour. Protests and notes regarding portions of the Walvis Bay territory were exchanged for years until the King of Spain, appointed as arbitrator, gave his award in favour of Britain.

The bay has had many variations in name. Early Portuguese navigators, impressed by the number of whales they saw there, called it Bahia das Baleas - the bay of whales. The Dutch sailors translated it to Walvisch Bay, and to the Americans and British it was Whale Bay. Some of the old British charts, however, printed the name Walwich and Woolwich Bay. The present Walvis is Afrikaans - a sign that the Union of South Africa now rules the territory.

Before the 1914-1918 War a magistrate and a few officials represented Britain at Walvis Bay. The only industries were whaling and fishing, and few ships called. But strange things happened occasionally. There was the island that rose suddenly above the surface of the bay,

remained for three months, and vanished ! If you do not believe it, the British Admiralty sailing directions, Africa Pilot Part II, contain a brief account of the event. But I heard the story from a whaling skipper who was there at the time.

"It came up steaming hot - an island of mud or clay," said the skipper." The island was covered with dead fish, and smelt of sulphur. There was no doubt about it at all, the island was 150 feet long, and it was photographed. Some great submarine upheaval was responsible. Millions of poisoned fish were thrown up along the beaches from Walvis Bay to Swakopmund, twenty miles to the north'ard. There were even a few dead whales among the victims. The cables broke, and tidal waves washed away a breakwater. A queer business. They were going to put the island on the charts. Then, when we looked out one morning, it had gone!"

That was in 1900. The island has broken surface several times since then; but it has never remained for long.

Pelican Point, the long spit which shelters the harbour, holds in its treacherous sand the

smashed hulls of many vessels. Fogs and sandbanks make the approach to Walvis Bay difficult. You can still see black shapes lashed by the long ocean rollers near the harbour entrance. It is remarkable how many years a wellbuilt steamer will remain above the water in spite of the constant pounding of the surf.

The town itself always gives me the impression of a place threatened by sun and wind-driven sand, yet bravely holding out against one of the most unpleasant climates in the world. Formerly all drinking water had to be condensed or sent from Cape Town by sea. A pipe line to the Kuisib River has solved that problem. The great buildings of the cold storage plant lend an air of importance to the otherwise dejected settlement. Houses have to be built on stilts. They lie six feet below sea level, and when the Kuisib River comes down in flood the wretched inhabitants must go from house to house by boat. Business stops, of course, and the train service cannot be maintained.

Nothing will grow in the sand of Walvis Bay. The only bright colour along that bleak shore is

provided by the glorious scarlet plumage of the flamingos in the lagoon.

Some years ago, when Walvis Bay was still nothing more than a fishing station, tremendous excitement was caused by the discovery of a pure and beautiful diamond. There is no diamondiferous gravel within many miles of Walvis Bay. After the appearance of the solitary stone geologists and prospectors who combed the neighbourhood were unable to find the smallest sign of those typical formations which always point to diamonds. The mystery was cleared up by a hunter who shot an ostrich near Walvis Bay and found several valuable diamonds in the gizzard. It is, of course, well known that ostriches will swallow any bright thing, broken glass and pebbles, to help them digest their food. This diamond-carrying ostrich had evidently picked up the precious stones on the southern fields and fled north to Walvis Bay.

Immediately the old method of prospecting was abandoned, picks and pans were left to rust in the fog, and a great ostrich hunt began. Permits were issued by the Government for the

new prospecting. In one gizzard alone fifty-three diamonds were found. Those who were unsuccessful in their hunt for diamonds discovered there was a favourable market for ostrich skins. The leather, when tanned, makes excellent pocketwallets and shoes for women. During five months, when the great hunt was at its height, twelve thousand of these skins were exported from Walvis Bay.

The ostriches, I should add, were of the wild type, with worthless feathers. These ostriches cause such damage to crops that they have long been classed as "vermin", a fate shared by lions and leopards in the territory.

The hunters set out on horseback with rifles, carrying thorn bushes for protection against the charge of an enraged ostrich. This simple device never fails. Brandish a thornbush in the face of an ostrich, and a second later you see only the dust thrown up by an enormous pair of feet.

Most of the hunters found pebbles when they opened the gizzards, but only a few discovered diamonds. It was an exciting sport. At night the deep, hollow cry of the ostrich can hardly be

distinguished from the roar of a lion. After five months of slaughter there were few ostriches left to bury their heads in the sand. The survivors found refuge in the desert.

Jackals, however, still infest the sand dunes of the bleak coast between Walvis Bay and Swakopmund; their tracks were pointed out to me as I travelled along the coast on the slow rail-motor. Many people who work in Walvis Bay live in Swakopmund and make this journey through the glaring desert every day.

There came my way not long ago a diary which gave me a vivid picture of the early days at Walvis. It was written by a woman who set out from Cape Town with her father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Dixon, in 1843, to establish a trading station at Walvis Bay, and they were the first white settlers. Travelling with three ox-wagons, they were on the road for eight months. Their guide and interpreter was a Herero named Saul Sheapard, who had visited Scotland with the explorer Alexander. The writer of the diary (afterwards Mrs. Latham) describes him as a "lazy scamp, but a great man for praying".

Mr. Dixon had arranged for a schooner loaded with trade . goods to meet him at Walvis Bay, and when the party arrived two tents had been pitched near the beach. "Ours were the first wagons to reach Walvis, and I believe we were the first white females to set foot there," recorded the diarist. Mr. Dixon searched the neighbourhood for water and at the Swakop river mouth he discovered a wreck. There were five cannon among the rocks. Natives told him that the ship had run aground years before, and that the crew had been murdered.

The Dixons cut poles and reeds and built a house in a hollow surrounded by sandhills. They lined the rooms with blue calico. A family named Morris, companions on the journey and partners in the trading venture, also set up house; and then a store was built. The children watched the natives fishing for stingray, sharks, and skate; they used kudu horns on poles as spears for this purpose. These were the days shortly after the discovery of the guano islands, and many schooners called at Walvis for fresh meat. Often there were a dozen at anchor in the bay at

the same time. One ship brought a young man named Latham, who remained in Mr. Dixon's employ and married the diarist. Mr. Dixon needed a blacksmith, sent to England, and thus Frank Bassinthewaighthe came to the territory. The Bassinthewaighthes have taken leading parts in the development of the country, and now rank as the oldest family of English origin.

Frank lived in a small deckhouse from a ship, and slept with his gun beside him. Not far away was a cage with two young lions which Mr. Dixon had bought from the Hottentots. One night the mate of a ship came on shore with a gang and tried to steal the cubs. They rolled Frank Bassinthewaighthe's cabin over, but Frank was a match for them with his gun.

One of the Dixon children died of fever, and was buried in a large trunk they had brought with them. Soon afterwards the family moved to the Swakop river, where it was possible to make a garden. They were always being bothered by lions, and the girls learnt to set guntraps. Then the river came down in flood and washed their corn away. Another child died, and again the

only coffin they could find was a trunk. Greatly depressed, the family moved to the Rooibank mission station near Walvis Bay and built a new home. Frank Bassinthewaighe married one of the Dixon girls; and later Bassinthewaighe and Latham opened up a copper mine inland. Mr. and Mrs. Dixon returned to Cape Town overland in 1851, but Mrs. Latham, the diarist, remained in the territory and recorded many queer adventures. She was shipwrecked on the coast of South-West Africa, and her manuscript ends in the middle of that exciting episode.

While sand is the main impression the traveller carries away with him from Walvis, the dunes are not entirely barren. The Hottentots rely on a strange desert plant for nourishment. This is the narra, a member of the melon family which sends its roots down through the dunes for fifty feet, if necessary, to find moisture. Hot sand may cover its green, leafless tendrils for a time, but the narra always strikes up to the surface to bloom in October. Rain may not fall on the dunes for years at a stretch. Nevertheless, the

narra keeps alive on the fogs that swamp the desert coast.

The ripe narra is full of edible seeds, which are treated in many ways by the Hottentots. Boiled, they make a porridge. Tough pancakes are formed by the narra fluid and stored for months. Narra beer may be brewed from the syrupy juice. At one time the dried seeds were exported to Cape Town to be used like almonds in cakes. The roots are prized by the Hottentots for their medicinal qualities, while oil is extracted from the raw pips.

Another weird plant wonder found in the Walvis region, a huge plant which has been called the "botanist's dream of paradise", is the *Welwitschia Mirabilis*. It grows only in the Namib Desert.

The *Welwitschia* survives in conditions of heat, sand and drought which few other plants in the world could resist. Friedrich Welwitsch, an Austrian explorer, found the first specimen in the middle of last century. Since then many botanists have travelled in these waterless wastes; but few

of the plants have been brought back to civilisation.

It is the largest plant known to science, and the longest lived. The exact age of a specimen cannot be determined, but it seems probable that the *Welwitschia* lasts for centuries. Yet it lives without renewing its leaves. When there has been no rain for years the *Welwitschia* resembles a bundle of dead brown vegetation. With the first hint of moisture, however, huge green leaves spread across the sand; battered leaves, several yards in length, springing from a wooden core shaped like a saucer. Some call it the "desert octopus".

Cut away the leaves, and you find this core goes down into the sand like a buried tree trunk. Twenty or thirty feet down it goes, drawing life from the last remnants of rivers that have ceased to flow. Often this moisture is salt, but unlike other plants the *Welwitschia* survives on the salty drops. Thus with the aid of its roots, the dew of night, and a soaking rain once in ten years, the *Welwitschia* flourishes. Other desert plants live under the same conditions, but they

are tiny succulents, not giants like the *Welwitschia*.

A brilliant red flower sometimes appears to add to the wonder of the "floral queen of the desert". Large cones hold the seeds with which the plant reproduces itself. Hardy enough in its own remote territory, it is exceedingly difficult to keep the *Welwitschia* alive in other soils. Permission is seldom given for the removal of a specimen; the Government of South-West Africa has imposed a £400 penalty for removal so that the *Welwitschia* may not become extinct.

One of the most successful expeditions to search for the *Welwitschia* in recent years was that sent out by Rhodes University College, Grahamstown. The two botanists penetrated an unexplored region along the dried up Ugab River to the north of Swakopmund, an area of which strange tales are told. They examined many specimens of *Welwitschia* on the barren mountain sides, and gathered seeds for the botany department of the College, which has one of the finest collections in the world.

The female variety is even rarer and more brilliant than the male. Altogether the *Welwitschia* is a grotesque survival of an ancient plant world - a strange relative indeed of the pines of civilisation.

This world of sand around Walvis Bay reveals many surprises. Travel south along the coast for thirty miles, and you reach a bird sanctuary, a lagoon ten miles long with a strange charm for the few who have been there.

It is called Sandwich Harbour (a corruption of Sandfish), and I know a doctor who spent his holiday there regularly for eight years. He is an expert with rod and reel, and he declares there is no better fishing anywhere in Africa. The trouble about Sandwich Harbour is that it is no longer a harbour. It is difficult to believe that ocean-going ships once anchored in the lagoon; but the proof stares you in the face. In the sand dunes you will see the decaying hull of a Portuguese gunboat. I have found an official record of a British man-o'-war, H.M.S. *Sylvia*, which visited Sandwich Harbour in 1880 and dropped her anchor in



Welwitschia Mirabilis in flower — the botanical wonder of the Namib Desert.

twenty-six feet of water. The date of the Portuguese vessel's arrival is uncertain, but it must have been in the 'eighties of last century. Apparently she called there for the purpose of careening and scraping the hull after a long spell at sea.

While the Portuguese ship was there the sandbanks in the entrance channel must have changed, for the ship was unable to regain the open sea. Some say that the crew died of thirst, not knowing that there was abundant fresh water to be found by digging in the sand near the edge of the sea. Owing to the peculiar movement of the sand on this coast, the ship is now firmly embedded in the dunes from stern to foremast. Some of her old-fashioned square ports can still be seen. Her iron plates have been polished brightly by wind and sand. At one time there was a figurehead in the shape of an eagle. No one could tell me the ship's name. It was a strange fate for a man-o'-war, and I doubt whether any other ship in the world has been lost in the same way.

Very early this century the Germans built a factory for canning meat at Sandwich Harbour. It was only a small enterprise, but it received so much publicity that a Chicago firm sent a representative to the territory to discover whether the competition was likely to be serious. After a few years the dunes swamped the factory and put the plant out of action. You can still find traces of the machinery jutting out of the sand.

Fish and guano were the real riches of Sandwich Harbour for a long period. As long as the lagoon remained open to the sea the guano could be taken out in surf boats and loaded by schooners. It was a dangerous game, however, for there was only six feet of water on the bar, the boats drew four feet, and the whole crew was doomed if the helmsman lost his nerve when a twentyfoot wave came curling up astern. Even the famous Kroomen from West Africa failed at this task; and then the company working the bird islands in the lagoon had to bring double ended whaleboats, partly decked and fitted with motors, to Sandwich Harbour.

Dangerous but profitable, it was. So profitable that one company in recent years decided to raise the levels of the islands to avoid the losses which occurred when spring tides washed hundreds of tons of guano into the lagoon. Sand pumps were landed from Holland, and during the season when the birds left the islands, the levels were raised three feet above high water mark. It cost £5,000.

For a time all went well. Then the loading conditions became more hazardous than ever owing to the narrowing of the channels in the sandspit forming the harbour. Mr. Donald Bain, an experienced Kalahari explorer, was called in to devise an overland transport service between Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay. He used a sixwheeler motor lorry with eight forward gears; but still every journey was a nightmare.

"I had to run the gauntlet between the sea and the dunes," Bain told me. "Even with caterpillar devices on the four driving wheels it was a struggle. Often on the narrow beach the waves would break clean over the truck and I would hear one cylinder after another misfiring. Once I

had to spend six hours digging the truck out of a soft patch."

Nevertheless, the overland service was operated successfully until Sandwich Harbour played an unpredictable trick on the guano company. The sandspit crept right across the outlet to the sea and the lagoon became an inland lake. At this time the island were producing two thousand tons of guano every season; but before long the two white men and the native labourers at Sandwich Harbour observed that the water in the lagoon was becoming stagnant. The fish died in thousands, and the birds, deprived of their food, deserted the islands. That happened in 1945, and until the sandspit opens again there will be no more fishing - and no guano.

Up to the time of this queer natural change, the doctor I have mentioned lived serenely for a month every year at Sandwich Harbour. There is a wooden prefabricated house, brought out from Holland, with almost every modern comfort. Fresh water comes to the surface near the house, and some previous occupant had made a garden amid the dunes. Wild duck, pelicans, flamingos

and a great variety of other birds visit the reed-fringed pools of fresh water. There are no other visitors in this silent world of sand. You may reach it in fair safety by horse or camel, but beyond Sandwich Harbour you will go at the risk of your life. Quicksand's await the unwary traveller who ventures south of the lagoon. Many years ago men bound for the Conception Bay diamond field with horse and cart were swallowed up. They had the pay for the diamond company's employees with them, but this coast is merciless and it has engulfed other men and much treasure.

One of the finest landmarks on the whole coast of South-West Africa is the steamer Eduard Bohlen, forty-five miles south of Sandwich Harbour. I heard the story of that shipwreck from a man who was on board her at the time. It was in September 1910 that the Eduard Bohlen left Swakopmund with a cargo of cocopans, rails and other machinery for the diamond company at Conception Bay. She ran aground in fog only a few miles from the diamond area.

Mr. Herrman Offen, of Swakopmund (the passenger who told me the story) then formed a syndicate and bought the ship for £1,000. He took off enough chairs, tables and other equipment to furnish an hotel in Swakopmund. Most of the mining machinery was salvaged and sold to the diamond company at Conception Bay. Within a few years the sand had formed up round the lost ship, and the Eduard Bohlen remained high and dry. She still looks exactly like a ship steaming through the desert.

This fortunate syndicate had not finished with the Eduard Bohlen. In 1919, when the demand for any ship that would float was enormous, a wellknown Cape Town salvage engineer, Mr. G. E. Austin, arrived in South-West Africa to inspect the Bohlen. Mr. Austin made a gruelling journey down the coast from Walvis Bay by cart and horses, accompanied by two mounted policemen. Again and again they were menaced by the dunes. Tons of loose sand often fell like avalanches, and when they tried to avoid this danger the sea broke over the cart. At night they were surrounded by jackals.

One notorious spot called the "Black Wall" held up the expedition until low tide. The dunes dropped sheer into the water and it would have been foolish to have risked a landslide. Then they struggled on and reached the Eduard Bohlen at last. Mr. Austin considered that there was a possibility of towing the ship through the sand and refloating her, and reported favourably. Thus the ship changed hands again, and the Swakopmund syndicate showed a handsome profit. Mr. Austin's plan involved the use of sand pumps. He intended to put the ship's own donkey boilers into action, pump out a hole so that the ship's head could be turned towards the sea, and then tow her back into the water. This ambitious venture fell through, however, and the jackals and seabirds still inhabit the open holds of the Eduard Bohlen. It would have been a great salvage feat if this ship of more than 2,000 tons had been refloated according to Mr. Austin's ingenious plan.

Only a few miles from the Eduard Bohlen lies the broken hull of the Union Castle freighter Cawdor Castle. She, too, was lost in fog; and

she, too, has since been engulfed by the sand. Soon after the wreck in 1926, Mr. Offen started to salve her cargo of whisky, but found the attempt unprofitable. That cargo has never been forgotten.

From the tower I can see the whole town - street after street of exotic buildings with mediaeval turrets, cupolas and quaint roofs.

It reminds me of a picture from a book of German fairy tales. But this grotesque architecture is Swakopmund, built on flat sand at the edge of the Namib Desert. The tower where I am standing rises from a £20,000 house where Hamburg merchants entertained German princes. Once it was a lookout tower, in the days when Swakopmund was a seaport.

I can see a panorama of minarets and timbered buildings reminiscent of Hamburg. Down on the seafront is the summer palace of the old German governors. Beyond the town is a place that looks like a charming, old-fashioned country mansion. It stands alone in the sand, decorative enough to catch the eye of an artist.



Year after year men exiled on the lonely South African guano islands scrape the phosphates off the rocks for use as fertiliser.

Years ago a very high official arrived by train for the first time, pointed to the lovely building and remarked to a member of his staff: "That must be my residence". He was not amused when he discovered his mistake. This mansion, set respectfully apart, is Swakopmund's gaol.

Swakopmund is a town which has survived after being deprived of its means of support. Very soon after the Germans occupied South-West Africa they realised that they would have to build a harbour here. Walvis Bay, only twenty miles away, was British. The roadstead of Swakopmund, with surf breaking on the unprotected shore, was a grim alternative; but they spent £160,000 on a stone mole which silted up and now serves as a promenade. Then the army constructed an iron jetty six hundred feet long and equipped it with cranes. Ships lay offshore, and surfboats carried all the cargoes for the northern part of the colony to this jetty. Swakopmund flourished as a seaport in spite of the surf.

After the South African conquest of the territory in 1914-15, no more ships called at

Swakopmund. Between the wars the Union spent more than £1,000,000 on the harbour at Walvis Bay. Swakopmund should have died. Instead, it became the Muizenberg of South-West Africa. If you visit Swakopmund in the relentless summer you will understand why people inland speak so wistfully of this town in the sand between the desert and the South Atlantic. It is often cold in Swakopmund while Windhoek burns.

A weird climate, really, when you remember that Swakopmund lies within the tropics. At bedtime, even in midsummer, you need the eiderdown which all hotels provide. But in the early hours you wake to find a hot desert wind blowing, so that the eiderdown has become intolerable. Weather records kept at the lighthouse show an average of 2,000 hours of fog a year. Sometimes there are sulphur eruptions in the sea, green flames and yellow smoke rise from the ocean with a rumbling sound and the town is filled with the fumes of sulphuretted hydrogen. At such times the water turns yellow and millions of dead fish are cast up on the beaches. Even whales become victims of

these upheavals. Black rain falls - rain containing iron powder drawn from a beach to the north of Swakopmund. The meteorologists have still to solve these mysteries.

Swakopmund enjoys some compensations. When the "soo-oop-wa" wind blows at Walvis, houses are shuttered and barricaded against the stinging sand. Swakopmund is often unaware of these violent storms only twenty miles away. Between the two towns is a dune world, always on the move, often burying the railway track, yet never - as you might expect - encroaching on Swakopmund. Lose your way in that sand and you will know at least the fear of thirst.

The drinking water at Swakopmund, pumped up from a borehole in the dry bed of the Swakop River, has a flavour which even an old resident must dislike. I know one tearoom which sends all the way to Walvis for water without the brackish taint. The brewery, too, uses Walvis water for the light lager which is famous throughout the territory. Some people condense the dew from their roofs. A rainy day in

Swakopmund is an event, for it occurs about once in ten years.

Among the sights of Swakopmund (I can see it from the tower) is a rusty steamroller with a story. They call it "Martin Luther", and it has been there since 1897. It was imported by an enterprising young German officer who thought he could conquer the Namib Desert with modern transport. That was in the oxwagon days, before the railway. With the steamroller came trailers and a mechanic. It was a fourteentonner, too heavy to be landed by surf boat; so it was put on shore at Walvis Bay.

There the mechanic realised that the venture was going to be a failure. He returned to Germany, but the owner found an American prospector with previous experience of steam-rollers. The American soon found that the lumbering juggernaut could not negotiate the sand; but he stuck to his contract and delivered it in Swakopmund three months after leaving Walvis Bay. It was slow going for a journey of a little more than twenty miles, though huge gangs of natives had been pushing it nearly all the way.

Once out of the sand dune area the puffing steamroller gave some service and carried a few loads inland. A season of heavy floods ended the enterprise, and the steamroller sank into the sand, utterly exhausted, on the outskirts of Swakopmund. No one has had the heart, or the energy, to move it. It stands as a monument to an unsuccessful pioneer.

Swakopmund became a railway camp in 1903, when construction of a two-foot gauge line inland started. The Herero war was in progress, labour was scarce, so the Germans gave the task to an Italian contractor. He arrived with 300 workmen. Meanwhile the line was urgently needed by the army, and the Germans pushed it on regardless of expense. About 750 more Italians were imported and hundreds of Ovambos were brought down from the north. Then began an irritating series of strikes which hampered the whole campaign against the Hereros. Water was another serious problem. Every drop had to be sent up from Swakopmund. Not until 1907 was the job finished, and when the Union Government took over the country in 1915 the

narrow-gauge railway from Swakopmund to Usakos was torn up and a 3 ft. 6 in. gauge line built.

When I first saw Swakopmund many years ago there was a local tramway system. Mules drew flat cars along the lines, with Madeira chairs and red carpets for the passengers. Pavements were wooden duckboards. Today the mule cars have vanished, and the wide streets are neatly paved with blocks of rock salt from the pans to the north.

You can find traces of the shelling of Swakopmund in 1914 by a British auxiliary cruiser. The walls of the old German customs house, below the lighthouse, still stand; but the roof, hit by a shell, has never been replaced. At that period the Germans were expecting an invasion at any moment, and some buried their valuables, silver plate and jewellery. A few little treasures are still there, for though the sand was turned up by many spades after the war, the owners could never remember exactly where they had buried their property.

There was also a certain amount of looting. One squad of soldiers marched out of a house looking like a burial party, with a large draped object on their shoulders. It was not a coffin, but a grand piano and they succeeded in taking it on board a small ship bound for Cape Town.

After the surrender, scores of German officers on parole were allowed to live in Swakopmund. Governor Seitz was given this house with the tower. (There is also a Moorish courtyard, and the panelled dining hall and rooms are splendid.) About thirty officers found an old surfboat, repaired it, equipped themselves for a voyage and were caught one night in the act of launching the boat. They had planned to seize a coasting steamer at Walvis Bay and return to Germany. Instead they went to the cells for breaking their parole.

Swakopmund's most exciting period between the wars, I think, was during the 1934 floods. The town became an island. The railway bridge over the river mouth was destroyed. The electric power station was flooded; this meant that no water could be pumped to supply the town.

Before the end of January the Swakop River reached the highest level ever recorded. Barricades of sandbags were built round the edge of the town; men, women and children responded to the danger signals and worked at night in an attempt to save the outlying houses. It was impossible to divert the river. Houses went down before the onslaught, and torrents poured through the streets. The district with one inch of rain a year received more than thirty inches in three months.

Many people in South-West Africa prefer Swakopmund to any of the Union's seaside resorts. They catch whiskered barbel from the iron jetty; sit over their coffee in the pleasant restaurant at the shore end of the mole; walk in the "Namib garden" the municipality has provided, and ride along the coast. Nearly every morning the massed clouds suggest rain, but no one is deceived. Every year, in the hottest months, the administrator and senior officials bring their work down to Swakopmund with them. They have revived an old German custom.

It is like moving from the plains to the hills in India.

Swakopmund would be a gloomy place without those houses out of the fairytale. There is a professional gardener in the town, and though his work is protected from the sand by high fences, you can see it all from this tower. For a desert town, indeed, Swakopmund has charm and much comfort. Thinking it over, I am inclined to place restful Swakopmund first among all the coastal settlements between the Congo and the Cape.

Deep in a stony desert, where rivers flow once in a decade, I have found a man who has made a rich oasis. This is South-West Africa's strangest farm. One day it will disappear, as it did eleven years ago, and all the work will have to be done again. It is the only farm in a vast area of the Namib Desert. The owner is Mr. H. Hrabovsky, an elderly man who learnt the art of cultivation in a rose garden in Czechoslovakia. They call the oasis Goanikontes, "the place where the thorn trees grow". Before Hrabovsky arrived in

1908 there were only the thorn trees in the dry, sandy bed of the Swakop River.

To understand Hrabovsky's achievement you must visualise the surrounding desert. It is exposed to such heat, cold and wind that the rocks have broken into fragments. You can hear them splitting on a cold night. Rainfall is less than an inch a year for ten years at a stretch. Sometimes the mists near the coast produce a little grazing for the zebra and springbok, gemsbok and ostriches; but there is seldom enough grass for cattle in the Namib, and even the game animals must move fast to survive.

At its worst the Namib is a black and terrifying desert. Plant life is rare and weird. Occasionally you see a Kokerboom (quiver tree), camouflaged succulents and euphorbia bushes. Along the coast are the shifting dunes, smothering everything. Maps show a number of rivers winding through this desert. They are sandchoked rivers, but the rocks underground hold the flood waters. Thus the riverbeds may be tapped here and there by men bold enough to

face the certainty of losing everything in times of flood.

Up this Swakop riverbed came Hrabovsky on horseback nearly forty years ago. He was seeking land in a country still largely unsettled; not a ranch, but a garden where he could use the skill he had learnt in Czecho-Slovakia. He rode through canyon after canyon, walls of rock on both sides, with only here and there a break in the sunbaked mountains giving access to the desert.

Elephants and rhinos wallowed in this sand up to the 'eighties of last century. Tusks are still found occasionally. You could imagine prehistoric monsters in the Swakop river bed - anything but a farm.

This Swakop River is an old highway into the interior. Explorers, traders, hunters, missionaries have all followed the course of the river; armies have trudged through this heavy sand. The peaceful Hrabovsky was searching only for soil and levels which would enable him to pump water over his seedbeds. At Goanikontes he

found the place which was to provide him with a living.

A courageous man, Hrabovsky. I travelled to Goanikontes by motorcar from Swakopmund. Jackals prowled near the river in daylight; and my driver, a keen hunter, told me that there were still lions, leopards and cheetahs in the mountains; and, of course, the packs of hungry baboons that harass the farmer throughout the length of Africa.

The last halfmile of the journey down into the riverbed is sensational. You leave the flat, waterless desert and slide down a rough track between sharptoothed rocks, shut in by ravines showing iron outcrops, but, with never a glimpse of greenery.

Then the riverbed appears, one and a half miles of it transformed by the ingenuity of Hrabovsky and his son and their native labourers. If you look up the river, into the sandy wilderness fringed with bush, you wonder how it is done. Indeed, it takes a rose specialist to make this sand flourish. Hrabovsky has twelve hectares (about thirty acres) under vegetables.

No use planting fruit trees here in the path of the floods. Once in ten years, as I have said, he must be prepared to lose everything - and he has lost it in a torrential drama which I shall ask him to tell you about. So today I see acres of tomatoes and cabbages, mealies and potatoes. He can supply all Swakopmund and the port of Walvis Bay with vegetables. In South-West-Africa vegetables are sold by weight, and during the war Hrabovsky sent three thousand lbs. a week to the Walvis Bay garrison. But not without effort.

"My pump brings up five hundred litres of water a minute - but it is not sweet water," Hrabovsky tells me. "The water has not been the same since the 1934 floods. I think the heavy rain washed salt off the mountains into the riverbed, and so both the water and the soil are a little brackish. That means I have to make experiments with seeds and fertilisers. This is not like the wonderful Orange River silt. My life is a battle against the salt. Only a man with long experience of the Swakop River can hope to make a success of it."

The other and greater hazard Hrabovsky does not care to think about. It is so unpredictable and inevitable that his attitude of mind is the right one. Let me tell you about the floods in South-West Africa, and then hear Hrabovsky speak of his own adventure.

Weather records in this territory are all recent. The Germans started to occupy the country in 1884. Before that there are only native legends and the diaries of missionaries. It is really impossible on the information available to arrive at an average; but it appears that the dry rivers probably run once in every ten or eleven years.

It is January 1934, and the heaviest rains within living memory are falling. They are frightening rains. South-West Africa is cut off from the Union except by air. Everywhere in the territory railway lines are washed away. One train, with its passengers, is marooned for a month in an inland sea. They say afterwards that it is the greatest flood since 1843 - the most devastating, in the minds of the natives, for nearly a century. All the rivers are careering madly, and new rivers are formed.

Now hear Hrabovsky's story of flood at his farm.

"I can hear it coming for three hours before the wall of water reaches Goanikontes," declares Hrabovsky." The roaring sound of the flood trapped in the canyon travels ahead like the beating of drums. Long before that I have seen the thunderclouds, and I have gone into camp above the highest flood level.

"But in 1934 I was taken by surprise. I had seen floods in 1917 and 1918 and again in 1923 - mild floods. Always floods mean losses; but I was not prepared for the 1934 disaster.

It swept my house away. I saved nothing and I was left standing dazed on the river bank ... I could hardly believe what I saw.

"I saw thousands of trees floating past at a speed of ten miles an hour. On the trees there were live baboons and snakes. Drowned buck, pigs, cattle swept past every minute. Sometimes I saw human corpses. I had lost my house, my crops. That flood cost me £3,000

"It nearly cost me my life. Only after I had been gazing on the scene of destruction for an hour

did I realise that there was no way out. My motorlorry was under water. The river was running so high that it was finding new ways to the sea, and I was cut off. I could go nowhere, it seemed, without a boat.

"Next day a small aeroplane circled over the submerged ruins of Goanikontes. Then I knew that my daughter in Swakopmund had realised the danger and sent help. The pilot found a place to land near the river, and flew me to Swakopmund. The native labourers were on the other bank of the river and we were able to send a truck for them. Now, when there is any possibility of floods, I keep one truck on each side of the river. I do not want to be marooned again."

Hrabovsky had to wait for months before he could rebuild his house on higher ground. He selected another site for the farm a little lower down the river, so that now there is Old Goanikontes and New Goanikontes. He will not lose everything in the next flood. Work goes on as though the drama of rushing waters cannot occur again. It must come - next year, or the year

after, or in five years time. No one knows. In the meantime the acres of vegetables grow neatly and successfully in the silent river bed.

Thirty-one years ago the tide of war flowed past Hrabovsky's place. Swakopmund had been occupied by General Botha's army, and the Germans were retreating up the riverbed. On February, 1915, German officers arrived at Hrabovsky's house and ordered lunch. There was a little fighting eight miles away that morning, while the food was being prepared. Hrabovsky served the lunch to a party of gratified South African officers.

After lunch Hrabovsky went on with his gardening, as he has done ever since in war and in peace. It is satisfying work - even in the grim canyon at Goanikontes. -:-

CHAPTER 13

SEALS IN THE SUNSHINE

At last I have made my way as far up the coast of SouthWest Africa as a man may go

without entering forbidden territory. This is Cape Cross, a rich place with a great past.

You would say at first sight that there could be nothing of value near this tone, weird headland. The beaches are littered with driftwood, but it is too far from anywhere to be worth gathering save for one's own campfire. Whales that died in these seas have left their skeletons among the timber; and these are collected and crushed for their phosphates. A few diamonds have been found, but the area is closed to prospectors. The real wealth of Cape Cross lies in sealskins, guano and salt.

Cape Cross is a hundred miles north of the port of Walvis Bay, and here I am "outside the police zone", to quote a fascinating phrase from the permit signed by the magistrate. Beyond this point you will find only bones of lost ships and castaways, and the skeletons of prospectors who ventured too far. This is the most northerly outpost on the coast. With a cold sea wind blowing and the white glare of the salt pans in my eyes it seems remote indeed.

Yet I want to linger here. This is the spot where the first white explorer landed in territory now ruled by the Union of South Africa; and here he set up a stone cross a year before Diaz discovered the Cape of Good Hope. This is the only place in Africa, probably in the world, where the seals haul up in thousands on the mainland to breed. I can hear the old bulls roaring from where I stand beside the replica of Diego Cam's cross. It is a grand, inspiring scene, and I have waited long and patiently for the chance of walking on these beaches and peering back through the mists of time.

Now I can understand why Cam chose this place for his monument. For hundreds of miles the surf thunders on the desert shore; but here there is a sheltered bay. The Portuguese navigator, a daring seaman hugging the uncharted coast, must have observed the cape and sailed in closer still to seek a place for landing. He would have seen the colony of seals on the beach. Possibly he thought they were human beings. No doubt Diego Cam and his crew imagined they were on the brink of a great

discovery as they stepped on to the untrodden sands of this far promontory. But only the seals and the seabirds greeted them, and these were the only spectators when the heavy cross was lifted out of the boat and set up as a sign of Christianity and also as a territorial claim by the King of Portugal. It bore the royal arms and a Latin inscription.

"Six thousand, six hundred and eighty-four years had elapsed since the world was created, and 1484 since the birth of Christ, when the most excellent and serene King John the Second of Portugal ordered this column to be set up by Diego Cao (Cam), Knight of his Court."

Cam had discovered the Congo in 1484, and the date of the landing at Cape Cross was really in 1485. There the cross remained undisturbed and unseen, save by wandering Bushmen, for more than four centuries.

Not until 1892 did a German patrol reach Cape Cross and make this important relic known to the world. Soon afterwards the German cruiser Falke, acting on the Kaiser's orders, steamed up to the cape. Cam's monument was taken to the

naval museum at Kiel, and a small wooden cross was left to mark the spot.

Probably the Kaiser felt some qualms about the removal, for he ordered a granolithic replica of Cam's cross to be placed on the historic site. This replica still stands, with the addition of German eagles and details of the discovery of the original cross by the Germans.

Some historians maintain that bold Diego Cam died at Cape Cross. This theory is based on a note on the Martellus map of Africa and reports of a congress of pilots and astronomers held early in the sixteenth century. Cam had instructions to explore every country he found, but there is nothing to indicate how long he remained at Cape Cross, or whether he travelled any distance inland.

It is grim country for any explorer without a motorcar or aircraft. The man who brought me up here owns a salt pan and a motorlorry to carry the great chunks of rock salt back to Swakopmund. Not long ago the police asked this man to take a patrol to the Ugab River mouth, eighty miles north of Cape Cross. The route is

waterless, and the Ugab River contains nothing but sand except in times of heavy rain.

They had reached the furthest point of the patrol when the fan came loose and wrecked the radiator. No repair was possible, so the driver of the truck offered to walk back to Cape Cross for help. "I took one quart of water with me in an oil tin," he told me. "I walked the eighty miles in three days and three nights. It was too cold to sleep at night, so I just plodded along day and night." He shook his head over that adventure, and pointed to the large water drum he carried on the truck. He never wishes to suffer from thirst on this coast again.

Salt has been worked at Cape Cross for many years. Ages ago there was a long salt water lagoon stretching southwards from the cape along the coast. The lagoon dried up, but the salt remains - on the surface in the shape of rock salt, and a little way below in great reservoirs of brine. These deposits have been estimated in millions of tons. In normal times it was difficult to make a salt claim show a profit owing to the high cost of transport. Wartime shortages



Cape Cross — the replica of the cross left by the Portuguese explorer Diego Cam in 1485.

brought prosperity to the concession holders at Cape Cross, so that today huge loads go down the road. All the way to Swakopmund you see the little wooden cabins where white men in charge of native labourers are leading bleak lives.

The greatest wealth ever uncovered at Cape Cross was the guano, and the story of the discovery is one of the most dramatic I have heard.

There were islands in the old, lost lagoon, and during the centuries the seabirds deposited many thousands of tons of guano. When the lagoon dried up jackals and hyenas preyed on the birds and drove them away. (You can still see jackals in daylight along this coast; jackals that live on birds and fish and young seals.) Centuries passed, rich guano islands were discovered off the coast of South-West Africa, but the Cape Cross guano remained unknown.

Now there enters an odd character - a beachcomber named Matthew, known on the coast as "Little Magee". The old hands still tell tales of "Little Magee", a marvellous shot and a

formidable man with his fists in spite of his size. I gathered the details of "Little Maggee's" masterstroke from a pioneer who lent the money which made the venture possible. It was in the lawless 'nineties of last century, before the German occupation of South-West Africa had become effective.

"Little Maggee" had been a sailor on board the famous Cape Schooner Seabird under Captain Patterson. He had sailed on fishing trips up the little known coast from Walvis Bay as far as Mossamedes, and he had scraped guano on the islands. When he quarrelled with one of the island headmen he took to the long beaches of the coast, trekked with the restless Hottentots, and was to be seen round their fires while the pipe went from hand to hand.

During his voyages he had often seen the white headland marked on the chart as Cape Cross. Natives had told him that the white deposit he had observed from the sea was the same valuable fertiliser he had shovelled on the islands.

"Little Maggee" made Walvis Bay his base. He had to cover the hundred miles to Cape Cross on foot, through the dry, uninhabited stretch of salt pans, under a baking sun varied only by cold fogs and sandstorms. Nevertheless he set out alone, carrying gin, water and biscuits. It was an ordeal, but he returned with the news that thousands of tons of precious guano were there awaiting removal.

Now we see the beachcomber as a man of action. "Little Maggee" remembered his family in England, wealthy folk, and took the first ship home to tell them of his find and secure capital to work the guano. They say that even in England he could not shake off his beachcomber habits entirely. Once, to the horror of the family, he was found in the kitchen passing his pipe around among the servants according to Hottentot custom.

"Little Maggee" returned to the South-West coast with a ship, and the removal of the great Cape Cross guano deposits began. Soon a wooden settlement arose on the barren shore, derricks for loading the guano into boats, and

finally a light railway. I found the last remnants of the railway during my visit. The railway lines were laid across the salt pan and strong Ovambo labourers loaded the trucks.

It was a lonely settlement in those days before motor transport, and several men who tried to walk along the sandy track to Walvis Bay lost their lives owing to thirst. A visiting clergyman once found himself stranded at the only water hole on the route when the disselboom of his wagon broke and the animals wandered away inland. He, too, might have perished, but some German soldiers collected the animals, followed their tracks and rescued the clergyman. At first all fresh water for the settlement was brought from England, but later a distilling plant was used.

For many years the settlement prospered, and at one time there was a cosmopolitan community of seventy white people and three hundred natives living at Cape Cross. The guano was worked out at last, the large dininghall, stores, houses and machinery were left to decay. But long before that day "Little Maggee" had made

his pile. I have never been able to discover whether he died on that lonely coast, or whether he retired to a life of strange respectability in England.

There is still a guano industry at Cape Cross, surely one of the most ingenious ways of making money that human beings have yet devised. It is nothing less than a system of artificial islands.

First in the field was Mr. A Winter, a clever carpenter, who now owns the largest "guano platform" on this coast. It was in 1932 that he saw a reef, uncovered at low tide, and teeming with birds. Whenever the rocks were exposed, the birds seemed glad to find a refuge there. Then the sea came up and drove them off their perch. They had to fly far down the coast to find another spot where it suited them to alight.

So Winter rowed out to the reef, saw that there was a solid foundation for a platform, and decided to build. Men who had lived along the coast for years laughed at "Winter's Folly" and predicted a costly failure. Winter started work. He drilled into the rocks, fixed heavy steel rods in position, bolted strong wooden beams

between and then built his platforms above. The manmade island, out of reach of the waves, resisted all the forces of the sea.

At first the scheme seemed to be a gigantic fiasco, for the birds kept away. For two years Winter waited - a little anxiously, perhaps, but never losing confidence. Then flight after flight of birds arrived and nested on his island. In that rainless climate, their droppings remained the valuable fertiliser that sells at sight in the wheat-growing districts of South Africa.

Winter saw that his dream had come true, and went on enlarging his island. The first crops of guano provided capital for further expansion. Today Winter's island resembles a midocean aerodrome, with room enough for an air liner to land on the deck.

One month's work a year by a gang of labourers removes the guano crop. At other times the birds are left undisturbed; for the more tenants Winter has, the higher his profits rise. The guano is shovelled into sacks and loaded by chute on to a raft. Three tons can be hauled to the mainland at one loading. Guano is worth £10 a

ton, the price is likely to rise, and Winter's clear profit amounts to thousands a year - some say £7,000.

Others have followed Winter's example at favourable spots. The Cape Cross platforms, covering several acres, are built on the mainland. Here they have to be high enough to place the nests out of reach of prowling jackals. They are close to the sea, but out of reach of the surf. Huge colonies of malgas (gannet) have made their abode on the platforms. Down below slink the hungry, baffled jackals.

Come back to the seals that lie sunning themselves only a few yards from Diego Cam's cross. You will find them along six miles of rocky beaches - the largest gathering of fur seals in Africa, one of the greatest in the world.

One sight I can never forget. The jagged rocks have been worn to the smoothness of soap by the bodies of generation after generation of seals. It must have taken a long time, for a seal is a soft, blubbery creature; yet the rocks have become slippery and treacherous. Probably they were

like that in the days of Diego Cam, and for centuries before.

Seals have poor eyesight, but they scent the stranger from afar, and then a whole colony will raise uneasy snouts and move towards the water. I stalked them upwind and came upon two bulls with cavernous mouths battling as all bulls will for the favours of the coy harems. It is a fight that is repeated endlessly; a fight that started long before the rocks became smooth; a struggle as old as the world. You can see the scars of last season's fights on them. The old, defeated bulls go off by themselves and form a sick, pathetic group, scorned by the sleek little females.

There is only one way, I found, to photograph the seals at close quarters. I had to set my camera, race towards the colony so that they could not pick up the scent, leap over the rocks and take my picture without a second's delay. They all came sliding past me in a panic-stricken cavalcade. This method, however, is not without danger. A large bull weighs up to eight hundred pounds, and some will attack and maul a man.

They will grip a man's arm, worry him like a terrier with a rat, roll on him and crush him. They know what they are doing on the rocks, those seals, while a man can find no foothold. Men killed by seals have a little cemetery of their own on the shore at Cape Cross.

November and December are the months when the seal hunters take their toll. Then the newlyborn pups are uttering their piercing cries - as well they may when men are using ruthless clubs among them. Pups are killed for their skins, bulls are shot for the oil they yield. There are, perhaps, forty thousand seals at Cape Cross during the breeding season, and every year about four thousand are slaughtered.

Long ago, before the lagoon dried up, Cape Cross was an island. That is why the seals still come to these mainland beaches. The instinct that takes them always to islands has failed to warn them of the changes at Cape Cross. For half a century they have been hunted in their ancient sanctuary. How long will it be, I wonder, before they seek new breeding grounds?

Now here is a point which may be new to naturalists. The seals, stripped of their valuable pelts, are boiled down at the Cape Cross sealing station; and during the process, stones are found in the machinery. It has been proved that the stones come from the stomachs of the young seals. Men who have studied the ways of seals declare that the young seals are taught to swallow stones as ballast, to aid them in their first attempts at swimming. I heard exactly the same story on a penguin island, and I can find no reason to disbelieve it.

Apart from the sealing station and the salt pans, there is nothing at Cape Cross. Only the sounds of the seals, the seabirds and the surf break that deep hush of loneliness. You would say that it was a queer solitude; that no white man would find it possible to spend half a century there, alone for most of the year.

Yet one man has done it. He is a Swede, his name is Hasselund, and he was shipwrecked there fifty years ago. The English company was working "Little Maggee's" guano discovery at the time, and Hasselund found a job as cook.

When the last of the guano had been shipped and everyone else had departed, Hasselund went to the sealing station as caretaker.

He is still there. Sometimes he selects a young seal and trains it as a circus performer. That needs patience, but Hasselund has lost count of time. He makes neat little metal ashtrays, too, engraved with the word "Kreuzkap" and surmounted by a tiny replica of the Portuguese cross. Hasselund is the Old Man of Cape Cross, and though I would not like to share his exile for long, I can say that I have met other hermits in less fascinating places. I think he must know more than any book can tell about the life on the beaches and in the cold seas that wash Cape Cross.

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CHAPTER 14

LOST WORLDS, LONE CORNERS

This weird coast of South-West Africa cast a spell over me long ago, and I am sorry to be leaving it. Nevertheless, the route I have mapped

out leads inland now - eastwards through the Namib to lonely places and strange peoples.

Along this path lies the "lost world" of Spitzkop and the Brandberg mountains; the old hidingplaces of the Berg Damaras; Otjikoto crater lake and the great meteor near Grootfontein; the Rehoboth "republic" and goldfields. All these odd corners give proof, in their own ways, of the surprises awaiting the traveller in South-West Africa.

Once it was a weary trek from Swakopmund, inland for ninety miles, to the Spitzkop pinnacles. It will take no more than three hours by car, and you will see the pinnacle of Great Spitzkop long before you arrive. These huge red granite rocks must rank high among the seven wonders of the country. They have never been climbed, though I know a mountaineer who has been within thirty feet of the Great Spitzkop summit; he vows that he will conquer it or leave his bones there.

You can see Great Spitzkop a hundred miles away if you approach it across the deadlevel plain. The air is so magnificently clear that at

thirty miles the details of the pinnacle stand out sharply - cracks and hogsbacks and sheer faces rising more than 2,500 feet above the yellow grass. At sunset the peak glows like a golden lamp. It is one of the great sights of Africa, and around it have gathered many legends.

Natives say that a monster lives there, feeding on human visitors, and there are still superstitious natives who are reluctant to venture near Spitzkop. One of a party of Cape Town climbers who attempted the ascent in 1940 declared that while some mountains were friendly, this one seemed to repel him. It has been called a "lost world" because this isolated group of enormous rocks still offers rare opportunities to botanists, geologists and those who seek Bushman paintings. In the caves you find stone implements and ostrich eggshells; and on the walls are typical hunting scenes painted by the Bushman. One of the finest has been chipped and ruined by an old German vandal who tried to remove the whole painting.

A white prospector once lived near Little Spitzkop, mining topaz and aquamarine on the

slopes. You can still find the shack where he lived; but the legendary topaz cave, where the walls are covered with semiprecious stones - that will be a long quest.

Water is the problem at Spitzkop. During the native wars the Germans tried to keep a garrison there. They built a dam at the foot of a precipice, but the rainfall was so scanty that the troops had to leave. After rain the gemsbok and zebra make for Spitzkop and all the rock pools supply water. In a dry season there is one muddy well where the water is not fit to drink.

One of the few scientific expeditions to visit Spitzkop discovered the remains of an ancient Bushman game drive in a funnelshaped break in the chain of mountains. Bushmen had placed logs across the gap to divert the game to their pits.

The north wall of Great Spitzkop rises sheer and naked from the plain to the summit, and this will never be climbed. It is the Matterhorn of South-West Africa. Owing to sharp changes in day and night temperatures, the rock peels like an onion, exploding dramatically in the darkness.

But it is possible to reach the needle from other directions, where boulders, ledges and corridors offer precarious grips. The rotten rock is the main danger. Here and there stones may be wedged into cracks to aid the climbers; but it is dangerous to cut steps. The climbers in 1940 reached a fairly level rock platform near the summit, but were baffled by a deep cleft between them and the final peak. They could see the ocean from that height. They are still planning the conquest of Great Spitzkop.

Eighty miles across the plain from Spitzkop is another and more massive "island" of mountains. This is the Brandberg range, mysterious to this day, almost forgotten in a far corner of a remote territory.

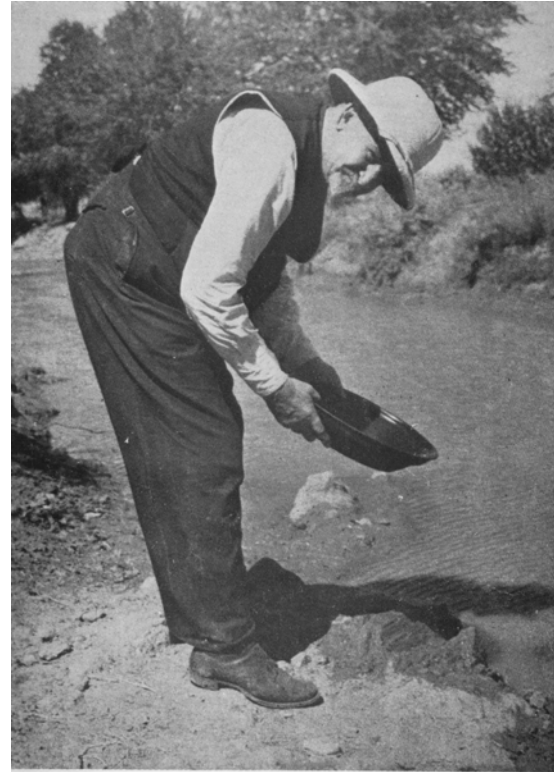
From the Brandberg rises the dome of Konigstein, 8,700 feet above sea level, the highest point in South-West Africa. It was not until 1917 that two German scientists named Hoftmann and Maack explored the unknown gorges of the Brandberg. They reported that the mountains had been the home of large numbers of Berg Damaras up to the end of last century.

While a few natives still lived there in a wild state, the range had been deserted by the old tribes, and they were unable to explain the migration. The solitude impressed both of them, with the southwest wind, echoing in the ravines, as the only sound.

They were short of water when they noticed footprints and followed them to a waterhole covered with plaited grass and strewn with sand. But of the man who had left the footprints they saw no other sign.

Maack copied a noteworthy Bushman painting in a Brandberg cave - a white woman with wavy hair and Greek profile, wearing shoes and holding a flower. It was thousands of years old, and another clear proof of Bushman wanderings southwards from Mediterranean shores. Maack also climbed Konigstein, and left a record of his ascent under a cairn. It was found in 1940 by the Cape Town mountaineers who tackled Spitzkop. Apparently no one else had been there during the intervening years.

The Berg Damaras who once lived in these boulderstrewn fastnesses are probably the most



The old prospector panning gold during one of the rushes in the Rehoboth district, South-West Africa.

mysterious native race in Africa. It is possible to explain the presence of every other tribe in all the different territories. But the Berg Damaras, living in almost inaccessible mountain strongholds, have baffled the attempts of all the scientists who have tried to discover their origin.

The typical Berg Damara is a small man with the features of a negro, with black skin and sunken nostrils. Now the natives of Southern Africa are not negroes; they differ in appearance from the Berg Damara as the Chinese differ from, say, the Australian aboriginals.

The Berg Damaras, a tribe of about twenty thousand, form a racial island in a sea of other distinct types. They have lost almost every trace of their past. Their language is the queer speech of the Nama Hottentots, who enslaved them for centuries. They are so humble that they have no name for themselves. The strong Herero tribe call them Ovazorotua - the "black foreigners". And indeed the Berg Damaras are among the blackest people in Africa.

They must have been the last distinct race in Africa to be discovered. It is about a century and

a half since Pieter Brand, the Dutch explorer, found the tribe in the Auas Mountains and brought news of them to civilisation. For long years after that date the mild Berg Damaras lived their wretched lives of persecution, robbed or shot at sight by the warlike Hereros. The introduction of firearms in South-West Africa made their plight worse, and they fled further into the mountains: How far they went no white man knows to this day, for there are large unexplored areas in South-West Africa.

A wonderful study for the scientist they remain. Untouched by progress, they are at least no longer hunted and massacred. They were freed from slavery by the German Government after the defeat of the Hereros in 1907, and granted a reserve of their own as a reward for their loyalty. Wanderers from the tribe are found everywhere in South-West as servants and farm labourers.

It may seem strange that no dim memory of their original language remains, but this is a fact. The Berg Damaras are clear on one point - that their ancestors were already at home in the land

when all the other tribes arrived. They have one legend only, that in ancient times they lived by a river which flowed all the year round. Not one of the sandy occasional rivers of South-West Africa answers to this description. Along the Orange River there is a tradition of a vanished people, the Kattea, and some believe that these were the Berg Damaras before they went north. But even the great Orange River often dries up to a mere trickle.

The Berg Damaras are bow and arrow men - as primitive in many ways as the Bushmen. Rock shelters were their homes. They are still miserably poor, for while other tribes own fat cattle, the Berg Damaras have only a few goats. Locusts are caught, roasted and crushed for preserving. Bulbs and berries, wild honey and caterpillars practically complete their diet. "Dagga" smoking, the drug of many an African tribe, has played havoc with the physique of some of them. Yet the Berg Damaras are still the finest mountain climbers in Africa. For generations they have had to climb to save their lives; they have inherited hard feet and great skill

in reaching heights. Possibly it is jealousy which moves other tribes to say that the Berg Damaras are not men but baboons.

They are thin, and never wash, for they believe that water on the skin is dangerous. Other tribes have a wide knowledge of herbal remedies. The Berg Damaras treat all illness by burning; a method which, as might be expected, produces very few cures, but in which they persist year after year.

As far as is known, they have never had a chief or leader. The tribal organisation was always so weak that they never combined to attack their enemies. Even their religion is lost. They say that in the mountains of the unmapped Kaokoveld there is a large black stone, which they call their great-grandfather; and that they and every living thing came from it. That is their only spiritual belief.

It is remarkable that such a weak and primitive people should have possessed one art which the intellectually superior Hereros lacked - the art of working in iron. As slaves the Berg

Damaras made weapons for the Hereros and later repaired their guns.

Probably the Berg Damaras were the first of all that horde of dark-skinned people who swept down from the north into South Africa. Cut off by some whim of fate from their fellows, the Berg Damaras in South-West Africa were not strong enough in numbers to resist the tribes which followed. So these negroes acquired the characteristics of several races; the hunting methods of the Bushmen, the language of the Hottentot, some of the customs of the Herero.

For them at least the coming of the white man was a blessing; for it freed them from the slavery and persecution that had been their lot since the Dark Ages.

Travellers who are sensitive to an atmosphere of the weird will shudder as they approach Otjikoto. This mysterious crater lake, twelve miles from the mining town of Tsumeb, has a more sinister reputation than any other pool of water in South-West Africa.

"No one who enters that lake will come out alive," the native guides told Francis Galton, the

explorer who discovered Otjikoto in 1851. Nevertheless, Galton and his companions, Andersson and John Allen, swam there to the astonishment of the Hereros, Ovambos and Bushmen who watched them. They emerged safely, more fortunate than other white men who followed in later years.

Otjikoto is a circle of enticing green water surrounded by steep limestone walls, shaded at the edges by cactus, tropical trees and thorn bush. The explorers must have enjoyed shaking off the flies and mosquitoes as they plunged, free from superstition, into the dreaded lake. To the natives assembled on the rim, this was magic and these men were sorcerers. Ovambos do not swim; the only rivers they know are crocodile rivers, and, wisely, they avoid the water. As Galton reached the bank and climbed out, the Hereros set up a chant of praise.

Galton caught a number of small fish at Otjikoto. He left with pleasant memories of the place. Possibly he would not have been so happy if he had known that the lake was a bottomless crater with a whirlpool in the centre.

When I heard the story of the whirlpool in Tsumeb I was inclined to doubt it. One of my friends disregarded all warnings and struck out cautiously across Otjikoto. As he approached the centre he experienced a slight dragging sensation; he was in no danger, but the thought alarmed him. I shouted to him to come out, and, after pausing for a photograph, he clambered up the bank.

A moment later we saw a movement in the deep shadow of the overhanging dolomite. It was a large snake, lurking among the weeds in the water; and when we stoned it, the snake went writhing into hiding. Of course it may have been harmless; but my friend will remember the waters of Otjikoto as the most repulsive bathing place in the world.

Above the lake I found a memorial to Johannes Stephanus Cook, postmaster of Tsumeb, drowned in Otjikoto on October 16, 1927 while swimming with friends. A man who saw the tragedy told me that Cook was a good swimmer. The water was warm, and there seemed to be no possibility of cramp. Cook flung

up an arm and vanished for ever. Those present had no doubt that he had been sucked down in a vortex.

After the drowning, vigorous efforts were made to recover the body. Balls of strong twine were joined, and a lead sinker was attached. The line was lowered from a raft, but the sinker did not touch bottom. Then dynamite was exploded in the depths of the pool. Bones of animals appeared on the surface, but the body was never recovered. The people of Tsumeb never swim in Otjikoto now.

Dr. P. A. Wagner, the geologist, examined Otjikoto some years ago. He describes it as a sinkhole lake, elliptical in shape, measuring 820 feet by 650 feet. Dr. Wagner gives the normal depth of water as 600 feet, but does not state, whether this is an estimate or the result of soundings. I know that attempts to determine the depth during the 1914-18 War were unsuccessful. On that occasion members of the South African Forces were trying to recover field guns and ammunition flung into Otjikoto by the retreating Germans before they surrendered.

Divers sent up from the coast reached a ledge not far below the surface and recovered a few shells; but the heavy guns still rest in the depths. They are not likely to be disturbed.

Supplies of water for the town of Tsumeb and the mine were once drawn from Otjikoto. Rainfall affects the level, however, and during the heavy rains of 1908 the pumps were submerged. In very dry seasons the lake has dropped back into its crater for seventy feet. The pumping station now stands rusty and abandoned in the bush.

Scientists regard Otjikoto as part of a huge underground cavern. There are similar lakes in the district, though many miles away; and experiments with dyes have proved beyond doubt that the waters are linked by subterranean channels. At Otjikoto the limestone roof has either fallen in or been removed by weathering.

The lake at Guinas, twenty miles from Otjikoto, is much larger. A series of small pools lead to a cave of stalactites, bats and skeletons. This is at Gamkorab and the cave gives access to yet another underground lake. The water is

difficult to reach; a precipice is encountered, and ropes must be used. I do not think much investigation of this lake has been carried out since a party of Germans explored the waters with a portable boat many years ago.

So the queer water system remains largely a mystery. Dr. W. J. Luyten, the astronomer, who visited Otjikoto, frankly admits that he cannot explain the forces controlling the rise and fall of water. "They are beyond our ken," he says, "hidden deep in the bowels of the earth." He records the fact that soundings have been taken to a depth of 400 feet at Otjikoto without touching bottom, and suggests that the leadline may have been swept away into one of the underground channels forming the inlet and outlet of the lake.

Otjikoto deserves to be explored more thoroughly by scientists. Placid though it may seem, the lake does not figure in so many native superstitions without reason. Men in Tsumeb told me that when the dynamite was used, fish with blind eyes came into the daylight; fish from great depths.

There is a cave near the waterlevel at Otjikoto. You may see bats and owls in this sanctuary, as Galton saw them, and doves circling over the pool. But you will not find peace beside these waters. Who knows how many lives Otjikoto has claimed?

Not far from Otjikoto, on the farm Hoba West in the Grootfontein district, lies the largest meteorite ever discovered. It seems that "areas of attraction" (as the astronomers say) exist in South-West Africa. Further south, a whole "swarm" of meteorites fell together on the banks of the dusty Fish River. I have seen pieces of this black metal used as paper weights; and at Gibeon I heard the story of the discovery.

Years ago an enterprising farmer named Peter van der Westhuizen noticed these fragments on his property near Gibeon. He sent specimens to museums in Germany, and soon secured a contract to supply meteorites at the rate of £4 per 100 lb. Many a profitable lump of metal he and his Hottentots dug out of the limestone.

I have visited a rockery built up with these meteorites in the public gardens at Windhoek.

Some of them are marked in a way that suggests the natives tried to chip off pieces of metal for their weapons, just as the Eskimos of Greenland used the meteors that fell there.

Museums in many parts of the world have offered to purchase meteors from South-West Africa at a price which works out at more than £35,850 a ton. But the Government will not part with these "fallen stars". An English scientist went to great trouble and expense removing a meteorite not long ago. When he reached the nearest railway station the queer freight was identified and the scientist was told there was a ban on the export of meteorites. He offered to pay the administration any sum in reason for the specimen, but the offer was refused.

Today it is forbidden even to move the meteorites of Gibeon from the graveyard where they buried themselves centuries ago. If a trade in meteorites ever becomes legal, prospectors will certainly make rich hauls in many parts of the country. There must be many of these masses still undiscovered.

So a fortune lies - unprotected in the Windhoek gardens. As the smallest lump weighs 500 lb. there is little danger of theft.

Before the ban was imposed some unknown prospector tried to excavate and break up the great Grootfontein meteorite. It struck the earth flat, so that its full size can be appreciated - a block of valuable metal in the wilderness. Blue marks may be seen where the prospector worked with hacksaw and blowlamp in a vain effort to cut the tough nickelsteel composition.

Astronomers think the Grootfontein meteorite may once have formed part of the sun itself. The Germans must have known of it, but the first scientific description was given in 1929 by Dr. W. J. Luyten, of Harvard University, U.S.A. A rusty appearance tells of the intense heat caused by friction as it entered the earth's atmosphere centuries ago. It is as large as a room, and might have wreaked havoc if the district had been closely settled.

The terror with which natives must have watched the descent of this meteorite can be imagined. A meteorite that passed over South-

West Africa in 1927 was observed from Angola to Luderitzbucht, though the restingplace has never been discovered. The Grootfontein meteorite would have been seen in fiery flight over a much wider area. About eighty miles from the earth a meteorite becomes luminous. Travelling at forty miles a second, it soon reaches white heat, scorches the starry sky with its sparks, leaving a flamed trail. Then it disappears. A few seconds later the remaining fragment crashes into the soil or the sea. Shrapnel from the sky indeed. Fortunately the atmosphere wards off the worst of the bombardment, reducing great projectiles to dust. Tons of meteoric dust settle on the earth every day. Very rarely does a large fragment thunder into the ground.

Many natives are superstitious about meteorites, declaring that those who go to the spot where a meteorite lies buried will meet with misfortune. A wily Hottentot chief in the Bethany district of South-West Africa, however, found it profitable to take a more enlightened view. He sold a meteorite to a trader for a barrel

of rum. The trader nearly broke his wagon with this heavy cargo, and finally abandoned the meteorite on the veld. The Hottentot soon found the spot, and sold the meteorite to one trader after another - until at last a trader brought a wagon strong enough to carry it away.

Several claimants started lawsuits when the meteorite arrived in Cape Town. In the final settlement they all agreed to present it to the South African Museum, where it rests at the present time.

Among the many oddities of South-West Africa is the Rehoboth "republic" - a strange community of half-castes. Here are sadfaced men with widebrimmed felt hats, women in old-fashioned clothes, occasionally a pretty girl with a complexion almost white.

They speak a language of their own, a mixture of Afrikaans and High Dutch. Many bear names honoured in South Africa. I have often spent a night in their tumbledown village capital after travelling through the huge tract of fine ranching country which they own.

In the centre of Rehoboth there is an aged tree surrounded by a fence - "die ou kapteins' vergadering plek" they call it. There the leaders of the republic met when Rehoboth was a republic ... the Campbells and the MacNabs, van Wyks, Beukes, Diergaards, Maasdorps, Carews, wise old councillors who have passed.

I had to apply to the "Kaptein" of the Rehoboths before I could gather the threads of their strange story on the spot. They guard their borders jealously against strangers. The "Kaptein" at the present time is the white magistrate of the district - an appointment the authorities were forced to make as a result of an armed revolt and other dramatic events. But in the old days the burghers of Rehoboth had their own rulers.

In the old days the forefathers of the Rehoboths lived in Cape Town, people of mixed blood who shunned those darker in colour than themselves. They drifted northwards, away from colour prejudice, and became pioneers and hunters along the northern frontier of the colony. They were Christians, missionaries lived among

them, their ways of life were civilised. For many years they encouraged white men to marry into the community by granting a farm with the bride.

The old half-caste trekkers were fighting men, too, and often they had to defend themselves against the poisoned arrows of Bushmen and the bullets of marauding Hottentot bands along the Orange River. Then, as white settlement advanced, the farming areas of the half-castes were threatened. By the end of the eighteenth century they had occupied a river frontage of six hundred miles. The community was about five thousand strong, owning muskets and cattle. They drew up their own code of laws and organised themselves, like a Biblical tribe, on a communal basis which still survives. It is said that they went as far as planning an issue of paper money which, however, was never placed in circulation.

Yet these adventurous people, cursed by their colour, could not live side by side with the white settlers. South of the Orange River they would have lost their land and their independence. Thus, a great trek was decided upon, and

northwards moved the whole community in a body - wagons, furniture, cattle, protected by the men with their muzzleloaders, northwards into the unmapped territory of South-West Africa. They were the first real settlers in that vast country.

Penetrating the southern desert, the half-castes sent scouts out in all directions to find land suitable for their needs. They had a choice which many later settlers envied, and they picked the best. In 1870 their leader, always styled Kaptein, Hermanus van Wyk, approached the famous Herero Chief Kamaharero at Okahandja and secured the present Rehoboth "Gebied" with other disputed territory. It was a complicated transaction, but gifts such as gunpowder smoothed the way, and a Hottentot claim to the territory was settled by a present of a horse a year. As a result, the half-castes found themselves in possession of a rich stretch larger than Ireland in the centre of a country about the size of France. Statesmen are still puzzling over the title or option of purchase granted to them over this veritable Land of Canaan.

Here, at all events, the people built their capital under a hill of pink granite. They opened up water by blasting, made gardens and finally erected a small "Raadhuis" or Parliament House. Germany had not yet appeared on the scene. This was nothing less than a civilised republic in a savage land, and the Rehoboth people clung to it tenaciously. Again and again they beat off the Hottentot attacks, suffering losses which are commemorated by monuments in the capital. Once they approached the Cape Government, suggesting an alliance, and failed. When Germany colonised South-West Africa they succeeded in securing a treaty which recognised their independence within their own borders; no mean achievement when the Prussian spirit of those days is taken into account.

The Germans, however, realised the value of the Rehoboths as allies in their merciless campaigns against the Hottentots and proud Hereros. A Rehoboth burgher never fires a shot until he is certain of a hit; there are few better marksmen in Africa. In return for their loyalty they were always treated as a people superior to

the natives. Governor Leutwein wrote: "They have rendered us very valuable services both in peace and in war. We must therefore attach them to us more and more and, in terms of their own expressed wishes, we should place them as near as possible to the whites."

The 1914-18 War brought a crisis in the affairs of the Rehoboths, once so far away from the busy world. South African troops were advancing into the German Colony, and the Rehoboth "army" was called up for service behind the German colours; but when military uniforms were issued there were signs of revolt. They pointed out that they had come originally from British soil and they did not wish to fight the South Africans.

A dramatic incident at this time was the secret journey by Kaptein Cornelius van Wyk and other Rehoboth leaders through the German lines. They succeeded in interviewing the late General Louis Botha, who had landed with an expeditionary force at Walvis Bay, and showed him their charter of independence. General Botha tapped the document. "All this gives you,

that, at the least, you shall keep," he is reported to have promised them. Botha and van Wyk are dead, but members of the Rehoboth escort are alive. The promise is the chief argument used by the Rehoboths in their attempts to secure greater freedom. On his return to Rehoboth, Kaptein van Wyk repeated his refusal to assist the German defence of the territory - a refusal which very nearly led to the extinction of the fighting men of the "republic". I visited the mountains at Kubis where the Germans cornered the rebellious Rehoboths and turned Maxims and field guns on them. The Rehoboths had found cover for their women and children in a cave; and this position they held for a day and a night, many using old rifles and black powder, until the last ammunition had been spent. At this critical moment the German commander received word from his base eighty miles away that Union troops under General Mackenzie were approaching. The Germans withdrew immediately, leaving ninety dead on the field, while the Rehoboths were left with light casualties to welcome the invaders.

They had fought for their "republic", and very soon after the Union occupation they sought to consolidate the position.

There were petitions to Mr. Lloyd George, interviews with General Smuts, the Governor-General in Cape Town and the Administrator in Windhoek. "We want to retain our status as an independent people under the Union Jack," declared the Rehoboths.

The settlement satisfied some of the older Rehoboth burghers, the section known as the "Old Raad". But a body of insurgents called the "New Raad" arose and incited a rebellion against the Union Government. In April, 1925, the village of Rehoboth was again an armed camp - a large body of police, a mounted commando, aeroplanes with bombs awaiting orders and hourly expecting the order to fire.

A serious factor in the situation, and one which, I believe, has never before been emphasised, was the presence in Rehoboth of Herero military leaders from all parts of South-West Africa. One temporary victory on the part of the rebels, and the war fires would have

blazed from every mountain top to bring the Herero nation into insurrection.

But the disciplined police and the moral effect of the aeroplanes gained the day. An attack on a police officer was followed by a bayonet charge, the streets were cleared, the Rehoboth' rebels taken prisoner. More than six hundred of them were captured.

That is why a white magistrate now takes his seat in the "Raad" as Kaptein. Most of the old, and often peculiar laws of the Rehoboths are still in force; the "Raad" is still responsible for the internal affairs of the country. But the Rehoboth people want more. They have forgotten their differences in the desire to see a Kaptein of their own race at the head of the little Parliament. They hope to regain all the rights they enjoyed in the far-off days when they first trekked into the unknown to found their "republic".

It is a romantic story, but unfortunately the modern Rehoboths are not a romantic people. They have deteriorated to an extent which only those who knew them last century can estimate correctly. Brandy has been their downfall. "A

Rehoboth will give away his farm for a bottle of brandy," they say in the South-West. The statement is literally true. Happily for the Rehoboths, they are not allowed to sell their farms to any person not of their own race. Without this protection against themselves, the Rehoboths would long ago have lost all they possessed. A Rehoboth burgher who wishes to purchase liquor must now obtain a permit from the police. Women are never granted permits. Heavy fines are imposed when white people sell or even give liquor to the Rehoboths.

Among the strange rights still enjoyed by the people is one relating to debt. "You are hereby invited to appear before the magistrate for a friendly discussion," the formula runs, instead of the usual summons. There is no civil imprisonment. White traders in the territory have to show extreme caution in granting credit to the improvident Rehoboths.

Fines go into the "Gemeente Kast", the funds of the community. There are "gemeente" farms, too, showing that the early socialistic ideas still

survive. A Rehoboth litigant cannot employ a lawyer unless the other side consents. These and many other laws dating back to the period before the trek are preserved in the tattered school exercise books in which the statutes were written.

The old Rehoboth lawmakers, as I have said, were men of different calibre from the lazy, incredibly stupid people who now make such poor use of their splendid land. I drove through the "Gebied", with its long grass and good trees, and found it almost unstocked. Klipbuck sprang up in the track, vaalkorhaan whirled away noisily. The Rehoboths have shooting privileges which no white settler in this land can obtain; they may hunt small game all the year round and big game like the gemsbok in season, and they pay no licence fees. Famous hunters there were among them last century - men like Old Mouton who went naked after elephant and smeared his body with oil so that he could slip past when the tuskers charged. Not many of the 1870 trekkers still live today.

So prosperity has passed by the slow Rehoboth people. Nine thousand of them, and probably not more than a score with comfortable incomes. The ambition of the Rehoboth farmer at the present time seems to be to lease his land to a white man - a matter which can be arranged - and live in the village on the rent. Many idle families are to be seen in Rehoboth, resting on shaded stoeps, smoking interminably, and no doubt discussing the status of their obsolete "republic". Cows and small stock wander round the houses; the night resounds with animal noises.

Once some of the Rehoboths were able to buy motorcars. Their ideas of money have always been hazy, and when they discovered that the runningcosts of motorcars were substantial they went back to their Cape carts and wagons. Their lack of any "money sense" was plainly revealed in one of their appeals for the old republican status. They declared they had a government ready to step into office, but they would prefer the Union to send them a Minister of Finance.

What will be the fate of the Rehoboths? Under a less sympathetic government there would be no Rehoboth landowners in the "Gebied" today. It is still possible that the right to sell their farms may be given to them. Then men with brains and energy will develop the neglected farms of the "republic". The shabby capital will see new buildings and the sandy streets will be paved.

But when that day comes the sonorous chimes of the old Lutheran church clock at Rehoboth will have sounded a requiem for a vanished and scattered race.

All the glamour of gold, the patience of the old prospector and the tireless energy of men recovering wealth in a fascinating shape are to be seen when there is a rush in the Rehoboth district. Several booms have been followed by slumps. I was there in the 1935 rush.

This was the Bret Harte scene. These primitive gold camps were as different from the mechanised routine of the Witwatersrand mines as a piece of streaked quartz and a golden sovereign. Some of these toilers of the distant

veld were pursuing phantoms; others paid their way handsomely; all of them were intensely human in their unassailable spirit of confidence.

I watched them near Rehoboth, digging, "panning", running their crazy homemade stamps and proudly displaying screwcap bottles holding the month's output. Here were Kalgoorlie and Barberton come to life again. There may be no Golden Mile or El Dorado in the Rehoboth district - despite the legends of "lost reefs" - but there was a living in it for some of the resourceful old hands who knew the game.

Rehoboth, indeed, was essentially a field for the small worker using simple and inexpensive plant and operating at low costs. The large companies soon dropped out. But the clanging of batteries was heard in the night and a number of little enterprises survived and even flourished for many months.

As far back as the time when Germany ruled South-West Africa, gold was known to exist in the Rehoboth area. Attempts to uncover this hidden treasure in recent years have provided some remarkable stories. Sir Malcolm Campbell

sought his lost shaking it with gnarled hands that had gripped prospecting kit from Lydenburg to Luderitzbucht. Gradually the heavy minerals sank to the bottom of the iron pan. I peered over his shoulder and saw the yellow gold against dark red sand, the sacred "colour" which every gold prospector seeks.

Prospecting at Rehoboth is hard work, but it is not intricate work. You need a pick or hammer, a shovel and a gold pan - and a barrier of courage against disappointment. Find your reef, and the labourers will break out the quartz. More labourers will hammer the ore and feed it into the stamps. Then water is added and the mixture passes over a copper plate coated with mercury. This catches most of the gold to form amalgam, while some of the gold which escapes is caught in the traditional corduroy blanket and recovered later.

The possibility of finding gold worth millions at Rehoboth is remote. They say that a German prospector before the 1914-18 War died on the way to Windhoek with a sample of marvellous value which no sample during the last boom

revealed. The first important rush occurred in 1922, when many rich pockets were discovered some distance to the south of Rehoboth; but no "lost reef" came to light.

Gold found by a farmer while digging a waterfurrow started the activity in the Rehoboth area in 1934. Very soon two thousand claims had been pegged, some of them in the streets of Rehoboth village. Companies and syndicates were formed, prospectors came hungrily from far corners of southern Africa, gold fever gripped everyone. Aeroplanes were used by several of those concerned, for distances are great, roads are mere tracks and many promising claims lay in remote and inaccessible country.

The samples revealed wonderful quantities of gold, often eight ounces to the ton, but they were not the sort of samples which impress Rand mining engineers. It is, unfortunately, notorious that the Rehoboth fields show phenomenally rich values in patches without that vital continuity which has made Johannesburg a city with a future.

Nevertheless many claim holders, dazzled by the first assays, refused offers of thousands for their rights. The prospecting area spread out to mountainous country which could be reached only on horseback. Each mail train brought fresh adventurers to the field. Scores of beginners pegged claims where there was no gold at all. They found that out later; meanwhile excitement ruled and the Riesling sparkling wine, sold in the Rehoboth hotels at £2 10s. a magnum, found buyers every night. A "Corner House" was set up, faint counterpart indeed of the great Johannesburg building.

As they scratched the earth this horde of prospectors discovered what geologists had long suspected; that the Rehoboth country, distorted by gigantic upheavals, baffled their attempts to trace the goldbearing strata. It is an attractive stretch of country with its mimosa trees, kameeldoorns and mountains dappled under the clouds. Fine hunting country, healthy, and offering great opportunities for raising cattle. But of all the hopeful hundreds who flocked there to win gold, only a handful remained.

Floods hastened the disillusionment. Sandy river beds became torrents. The camp fires that had blazed on frosty winter nights for miles along the black quartz reefs were quenched by the summer rains. Sounds of blasting no longer reverberated across the veld. Pegs were pulled out to save the claim fees, and the drenched throngs of speculators departed.

One interesting discovery was made towards the end of the rush period by a party of prospectors who decided to strike out beyond the borders of the Rehoboth fields into the Namib Desert. These men traced old gold workings, trenches, shafts and drives, on a series of parallel reefs. The find was made in lonely uninhabited country, which has been visited by few men since the original, mysterious miners left these signs of their toil. Was this the "lost reef" for which Sir Malcolm Campbell searched? Who worked it, and with what result? Such was the riddle of the Namib.

So the small man who banks his hopes on mercury and corduroy and is prepared to move when the "free milling" gold peters out the small,

experienced goldseeker retains his faith in Rehoboth. Men like Mr. Lackmann, an American prospector I met. He found the first gold in the area as far back as 1908, and still hoped to see his property paying dividends.

Such men never lose hope. They deserve all the encouragement South-West Africa can give them, for they belong to the type which, in the past, has produced millions of golden sovereigns and enriched us all. Wish them well, wish them years of good fortune as they work their narrow reefs. For only by playing this game of hide-and-seek with Mother Earth can rich secrets be exposed at last.

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CHAPTER 15

FORTS IN THE WILDERNESS

Namutoni, the great white castle in the northern wilderness of South-West Africa beside the Etosha Pan, is one of the sights of the territory that is too remote for most people to see. Everything beyond Namutoni is "outside the

police zone". An adventurous spirit, having secured a permit, goes on from there at his own risk - and the risk may be considerable. Beyond Namutoni he will meet Bushmen and other natives who have never seen a white face. He will encounter wild elephants, and he will be warned (as I was not to sleep near the favourite waterholes of the lions. If his car breaks down he may die of thirst, and he will not be the first to meet that fate beyond Namutoni.

No wonder the traveller sometimes likes to linger for a while at Namutoni. It is one of a number of forts built by the Germans in South-West Africa. The atmosphere of the Foreign Legion clings to its ramparts and towers. Through the loopholes, men have gazed on scenes of desperate adventure and fired into the ranks of attacking Ovambo hordes. Even in recent years, Namutoni has known sudden death. The old castle is now the last police outpost in the north. Stand in the courtyard and hear the grim story.

Very early this century the Germans wished to establish a place of safety from which they

could negotiate with the unconquered Ovambos and recruit labour for the newlyopened copper mine at Tsumeb, seventy-five miles away. The distance may not seem great, but even now a car journey from Namutoni to Tsumeb, in the rainy season, may take six weeks. For this reason the police sergeant in charge keeps camels in reserve.

So Namutoni was built to some mediaeval plan, probably inspired by the castles of the Rhine. Towers at each corner of a large rectangle provided the officers and men of a cavalry regiment with comfortable quarters. High walls (now sadly decaying and broken in places) enclosed the courtyard, while the arched gateways could be quickly barricaded.

From the towers the sentries gazed on as remarkable a scene as any in Africa. They could stare until they were tired on herds of blue wildebeest and gemsbok hundreds strong; they could pick off a lion at a range of a hundred yards; lacking meat, they might have killed a thousand springbok in a day without frightening the game. Green bush, brown sand. Bluishwhite

dazzle of the Etosha Pan, light blue sky, the massed animals from zebra to ostrich... wonderland indeed for a bored sentry.

So this barrier was thrown up by the Germans to keep off the strong Ovambo tribesmen. Native campaigns against Hottentot and Herero were being waged in the south; wars that lasted for years and gave the Germans no inclination to "civilize" Ovamboland. Wisely they went no further than Namutoni. But it was not long before Namutoni had to be defended. A force of five hundred Ovambo fighting men, stirred up by rebellious Hereros, appeared at Namutoni on January 28, 1904. At that time there was a garrison of only seven men, commanded by Unter Offizier Fritz Grossmann.

You will find the names of these men inscribed on a stone monument to their gallantry just outside the main entrance at Namutoni. Sergeant Bruno Lassmann, Richard Lemke, Albert Leir, Jakob Bassendowski, Franz Becker, and Karl Hartmann were the others. Hartmann told me the story. He was feeding his dog after a rich dinner in honour of the Kaiser's birthday

when he happened to look out through a slit in the tower. One of his companions was placing bread in the oven. Hartmann shouted the alarm. He had seen the ostrich plumes of the Ovambo warriors and the bread was forgotten.

They closed the gates. Nine natives employed by the Germans as servants and cattleherds failed to reach the fort in time, and were murdered by the Ovambos. The men of the little garrison realised they could not defend the whole fort; and so they chose one massive tower, stocked with food and water and ammunition.

I slept in that tower, in a stoneflagged room at the head of a stone stairway. And I understood how those seven determined men had kept the horde at bay. They must have raked the approaches in all directions, and with their accurate rifle fire they massacred the Ovambos again and again as they rushed the entrance. The Ovambos were armed with Martini-Henrys. Their bullets pitted the tower, but only one of the Germans within was wounded. After several assaults had been driven off there was a parley. The Germans had all their flags flying in

celebration of the Kaiser's birthday; and the Ovambos were inquisitive about this display.

"We are expecting relief from Tsumeb - many troops are on the march, and they will be here at any moment," the German "unter offizier" shouted to the Ovambo interpreter.

The Ovambos withdrew to consider this information. Sunset came, and with the dusk the six men carried their wounded comrade out of the tower, slipped into the bush, and hurried away towards Tsumeg. When the Ovambos returned to the attack at daybreak they found the tower empty. Round Namutoni lay one hundred and fifty dead Ovambos.

The castle was set alight and partly destroyed, but the Germans restored it and stationed a larger garrison there. Some inspired, forgotten military commander built the most pleasant swimming bath I have ever known, an oval pool supplied by a generous fountain, shaded by palms and reed walls. The water is always passing through this bath, to the delight of the dusty traveller. It runs away to the Etosha Pan, where the animals drink. The white castle, the green bath and the wild

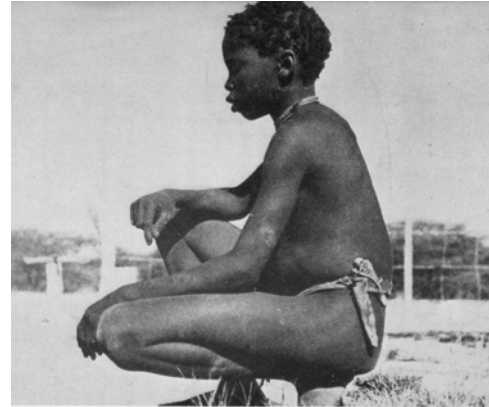
beasts, all seen at one glance, form a memorable picture on the screen of memory.

Karl Hartmann lived for forty years on a lonely farm twenty miles from Namutoni. It was almost the last farm in South-West Africa in the north. Hartmann was a man of immense strength and courage. Attacked by a wounded leopard some years ago, he fought with his hands until the leopard crept away exhausted. Then he staggered home to dress his wounds. He organised a road motor service to carry the mails through the difficult country between Tsumeb and Ovamboland. He was a true pioneer.

On January 20, 1946, Karl Hartmann went out from his farm with a Bushman tracker to find a lion which had been killing his cattle. He had killed more than fifty lions in his time, and had wounded this lion the previous day. After following the trail for eighteen miles the Bushman led Hartmann up to the wounded lion.

Hartmann, for once in his life, missed completely and the lion brought him to the ground. Still vigorous at sixty-five Hartmann fought the lion as he had wrestled with the

leopard. It was hopeless. The old defender of Namutoni died under the lion's claws.



Study of a young Bushman, photographed by the author at Namutoni, on the edge of the Etosha Pan, South-West Africa.

Sergeant Kleynhans of the South-West Africa Police and his wife were the only white residents at Namutoni when I was there in 1938. They were used to living in solitude. At a previous "out station", Mrs. Kleynhans told me, she had not seen another white woman for seven months.

"Only a few nights ago, seven lions walked past this house and prowled round the kraal where the camels sleep," went on Mrs.

Kleynhans. "The native constable threw sacks, soaked in paraffin and set alight, into the kraal. That drove the lions off."

From the police point of view, Namutoni is an agreeable station. Pawpaws grow in the garden. The sergeant is entitled to shoot three springbok a month for his own pot, and one wildebeest for the servants. Guinea fowl and wild duck vary the menu. They have a cow. The rent is only £2 14s. a month, and as there are no entertainments it is possible to save money. An unmarried sergeant once remained at Namutoni for five years and was sorry to leave.

Not that life passes there without excitement. Sergeant Kleynhans had dealt with two murder cases since his arrival four months before. A baby, born in a Heikum Bushman camp not far away, was murdered by the mother and grandmother. According to primitive Bushman custom, the mother was still feeding a child of five when the second was born. There was not enough nourishment for two - the newcomer was doomed. And the two women who obeyed the barbaric law went to prison for nine months.

Some years ago a previous station commander at Namutoni, Lance-Sergeant Poucher, took his wife and young children for a motordrive. He saw a party of Ovambos in the bush, suspected that they were deserters from the mines, and stopped to question them. One of the Ovambos stabbed him to the heart. A motor-lorry driver found the griefstricken wife soon afterwards; but the Ovambos had disappeared. One white constable followed the trail. There was another struggle when he found them, but this time the murderer was killed.

Mrs. Kleynhans slept with a shotgun beside her bed when her husband went away on patrol. She has had the experience of locking the door against native robbers and seeking safety on the roof with all the station's firearms piled beside her. She is not a nervous woman.

Usually there is Gert within call - the native constable, halfHottentot, halfBushman, and one of the most skilful trackers in the country. I went over part of the Etosha Pan with Gert as my guide. He could reconstruct any drama of the veld from marks imperceptible to my eyes. He

spoke Bushman, Hottentot, Ovambo, Afrikaans, and English. A useful fellow to have handy where civilisation ends.

Then there was a young and naked and nameless Heikum Bushman who brought water, washed the plates, attended to my needs in the tower, and showed wild pleasure on receiving a gift of sardines. He had wandered into Namutoni, and no doubt by this time he has heard the call of the spaces and vanished again after the manner of his race. But a Bushman servant, while he remains, is among the best. Show him once how things should be done and his imitative gift will come into play. I thought of bringing the little Heikum back to Cape Town with me - and decided otherwise.

Namutoni fell into the hands of General Coen Brits during the 1914-18 War. After the surrender, General Botha sent a message to Namutoni regretting that he would have to keep the brigade there for a time. To which the famous answer was sent: "I have captured ten thousand bottles of rum. My men have as much wild beast flesh as they can eat. We are content."

"Wer da?" Here is another castle, and the challenge of a ghostly German sentry seems to ring from the tower as I stand before the mud walls at sundown.

This is Warmbad, the first white settlement in South-West Africa. It is still the first village you reach after crossing the Orange River frontier on the thousandmiles' highway between Cape Town and Windhoek. It suggests guerrilla raiders, machine guns, forced marches and lost patrols.

At Warmbad such impressions are true. This village of square white houses has seen all the drama of the desert. There you will find men and women who lived through desperate attacks and siege after siege, even in this century. Rusting in the shadow of the fort are the very cartridge cases jerked out of long Mausers during the last defence against the Hottentots. So there are ghosts in Warmbad ... of murdered missionaries and settlers, of Hottentot desperadoes hanged in the village square, of ambushed German cavalrymen.

The land of yellow grass, kokerbooms and boulderstrewn mountains round Warmbad was

visited by a few bold Dutch East India Company explorers in the eighteenth century. Runaway criminals from the Cape, the Greek filibuster Stephanos and others, found a refuge there when the country was in the possession of the Hottentot outlaw chief Jager Afrikaner.

Afrikaner! This man and his descendants left their family name in bloodred letters on the story of Warmbad and South-West Africa. These Hottentot leaders and their clans make a fascinating study. They came into close contact with the white man earlier than any other native race in Southern Africa. They learnt to use horses and firearms, and when they were pushed northwards from Table Bay their knowledge made them dangerous.

Veldschoendragers, Topnaars, Bondelswarts, Scorpions, the Red Nation - by such names the clans were known. With their light skins, Chinese eyes and peppercorn hair, they were different from all the other native races; cunning and cruel in the wars they waged, clan against clan, with girls and cattle as the prizes. Some of the leaders, or Kapteins as they were called, had

a trace of European blood in them, and long ago there were educated men among them. (Hendrik Witbooi's diary reveals a polished literary style.) In spite of more than a century of campaigns, it cannot be said that the Hottentot bands were ever decisively beaten until they were bombed in 1922 from the air.

Such were the people who made the Warmbad district their hunting ground when Abraham and Christian Albrechts of the London Missionary Society founded the pioneer mission at Warmbad early last century. Jager Afrikaner's stronghold was an island in the "water juggle" of the Orange River at that time; but he moved to a spot near Warmbad to watch developments. Very soon the Albrechts brothers were forced to ride southwards for their lives while Afrikaner looted and wrecked the little mission.

The great Robert Moffat reopened the Warmbad mission in 1818. So wonderful was his influence that he succeeded in converting Jager Afrikaner, and Startled Cape Town by taking the Hottentot there with him on a peaceful visit. Lord Charles Somerset was so pleased to find

this terror of the frontier tamed that he gave Afrikaner a wagon.

This pleasant interlude at Warmbad did not last long. Moffat departed, the Wesleyans took charge, and their first missionary, a Yorkshireman named William Threlfall, was murdered in his sleep by Bushmen. Edward Cook, another Wesleyan, took up the perilous post at Warmbad (which he named Nisbet's Bath) in 1834, and lived there with his wife and children, working among the Bondelswarts. Mrs. Cook was thus the first white woman to make her home in Great Namaqualand, and for some time this little family were the only white people in the country.

They lived among the wild tribes which were constantly at war. About the middle of last century, however, a sort of Hottentot League was formed, and the new allies turned on the proud Hereros. The Hereros are in many ways a fine race, with the qualities of the Zulus; but the Hottentots called them "their dogs" and defeated them again and again. It was not until the Great

Peace of Okahandja, signed in 1870, that the Hottentots and Hereros were at peace.

During all this time there were only a few dozens of white people, traders, hunters, and missionaries, in the whole of South-West Africa - a country of 332,450 square miles, about three-fourths the area of the Union of South Africa. But now a new enemy appeared with the proclamation of the German protectorate. Again Warmbad resounded with the march of armed men and the crack of rifles. No wonder the settlers built their white, boxlike houses with thick walls and loopholes. The first fort was designed to protect the watersupply. It was completed in 1893, and ten years later a garrison of eleven Germans were holding it and firing into a horde of attacking Bondelswarts.

This revolt was started by Kaptein Abraham Christian, who gave the signal for the rising by killing a German police officer on patrol. Warmbad held out until relief arrived; but the southern territory was ablaze and fresh attacks were expected at any moment. A brass saluting cannon was used for warning the people of

Warmbad to race for the fort at the first sign of attack.

Kaptein Christian had been shot dead in the first skirmish. His place was taken by one of the most dangerous leaders ever known in the territory, a Napoleon of the veld named Marengo. This half-breed HottentotHerero had as his lieutenant one Morris, whose father had been a white man. The Germans were unable to come to grips with these crafty desert fighters in the mountainous country round Warmbad. When hard pressed, Marengo and his followers would dash across the international frontier into the Cape Colony; and there the Germans dared not follow them. To add to their difficulties, the Germans were desperately engaged with the Hereros in the north and could spare a field force of only five hundred men for the campaign against the Bondelswarts.

Broken rifles, ration tins, water bottles and skeletons in the lonely mountain valleys, relics still seen by prospectors, tell fragments of the story of this long guerrilla war.

The peace treaty of 1904 left the Bondelswarts undefeated. After a rest of only a few months not only the Bondelswarts, but all the other Hottentot clans rose against the Germans. Settlers on isolated farms were massacred. Again the brass cannon boomed over Warmbad; again Warmbad and a dozen other lone forts were besieged. Even Hendrik Witbooi, who had been a faithful ally of the Germans in several campaigns, joined in the insurrection, only to meet his death on the farm now called Witbooisende.

Clan after clan was conquered by the German corps hurried into the field, until at last the attack could be concentrated on those last stubborn guerrillas, the Bondelswarts. Fighting raged round the waterholes of the Warmbad district. Water means life in that parched land, where the rainfall is only 3½ inches a year. Today, as you travel through the territory, search the mimosa and kameeldoorn round sources of water and you are almost certain to find the graves of the German dead.

The Bondelswarts continued to cut off small patrols, while the evasive Marengo outwitted the whole German punitive expedition. In 1906 Marengo was hunted over the Cape border and taken to Prieska as a political prisoner. Soon afterwards he escaped, returning to German territory to stir up trouble again. On this occasion, the Cape Government agreed to cooperate with the Germans and Major Elliott of the Cape Mounted Police was ordered to capture Marengo if he entered the Cape Colony.

The end of Marengo was a drama typical of this strange, wild frontier. It was described to me by a police sergeant who took part in the operations. "Marengo crossed the river with about four hundred men, and a signaller on a distant kopje warned us he was coming," recalled the sergeant. "When Marengo saw the troop of sixty-five Cape Mounted Police he started firing. From the whine of the bullets we could tell the Hottentots were using Martini and Mauser rifles captured from the Germans. Our officer gave the order to charge, and we rushed them on horseback, firing as we went. Three men

rose suddenly in front of me, and one was Marengo. I recognised him in a flash by his powerful build, widebrimmed hat, brown riding breeches and leggings. A trooper shot at him and missed. Then our officer shot him right between the eyes. Almost immediately the rest of the Hottentots threw down their arms and surrendered."

Thus ended a campaign which cost Germany £30,000,000 and fifteen hundred of her finest Colonial troops. Major Elliott and his officers received the Kaiser's decoration, and there was peace at Warmbad until the outbreak of the 1914-18 War.

It was the custom of the Bondelswart Hottentots, when forced to surrender, to hide their best rifles and hand in the most antiquated weapons. The death of Marengo quietened them; yet as I have already mentioned, they did not hesitate to take up arms in 1922 against the Union Government when a dog tax was introduced. The South African Air Force subdued them in a week.

The old fort at Warmbad is now a farm, with pigeons nesting in the tower. A police station, built like a solid stone castle, still guards the village that has seen so much bloodshed. Stand by the grey walls when the clear moon of South-West Africa floods the veld. Watch this grim cavalcade of Warmbad's past ...

Here are the first Hottentots, the Nama people, naked men with flutes playing while the skinclad women dance. Then Hendrik Hop of the Dutch Company; you can almost hear the rumble of his caravan of fifteen wagons heavilyladen with the pelts of rare giraffes. Martyred missionaries, daring travellers, the shade of Sir James Alexander passing on his great journey to Walvis Bay, the centenarian Hottentot leader Timotheus Snebe, murdered trekboers, grey uniformed German soldiers with felt hats turned up on the right, South Africans in khaki who fell during the advance into "German West". All these pass, while elephants and lions roam in the darkness, and the camels of the ghostly procession stare and shiver as the night sounds come to them.

"Wer da?"

But the ghosts of Warmbad do not answer.

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CHAPTER 16

OUTSIDE THE POLICE ZONE

Daybreak in the wilderness of South-West Africa. As I wakeup and draw in the first deep breaths of the great, pure, desert air, a familiar cavalcade swings past. I unbutton my sleeping bag to watch and salute them - the men of the police camel patrol.

The helmeted, khakiclad leader is a sergeant, rolling and jerking in the saddle as he sets the "sand shuffle" pace of eight miles an hour, the least nerve-racking of all camel speeds. Then the dark-skinned orderlies, coloured men and natives with their felt hats and blue jackets, rifles, small iron watertanks, blankets and rations.

A wave, a smile and they pass my camp to cover their day's "beat" of forty miles on camel-back; forty hot and tiresome miles to inspect cattle and collect taxes from unwilling dwellers in "the blue"; to report invading swarms of

locusts, hear the latest story of Bushman wickedness, or gather unpalatable facts for the agricultural census. Such is the routine of camel patrols over this vast territory, from the unmapped Kaokoveld south to the parched mountains of the Orange River, and from pleasant Swakopmund eastwards to the frontier beyond Gobabis. From post to remote post the camels make their complaining way. "Oooh!" they grumble, even at feeding time.

But for the riders there is always a prospect of adventure over the next sanddune - encounters with wild animals and wilder men. The life in remote corners of South-West Africa today is very much the life men knew in South Africa a century or more ago. There I have found the men of the camel patrol at home, I have shared their coffee with them and heard their tales.

Camels are still used by the police for many difficult journeys "outside the police zone" in South-West Africa. You meet cars in the most unlikely places nowadays; but the camel may provide a safer means of transport on certain vague and waterless routes. I find comfort in that

official phrase "outside the police zone". It suggests that something of the old, lawless Africa survives in these unmapped spaces.

You may wonder how it is possible that large territories should remain unpoliced and unexploited, even unexplored sixty years after Germany annexed South-West Africa, and thirty years after occupation by the Union of South Africa. Yet this is a fact. The latest official map shows blank spaces and little known areas amounting to more than 100,000 square miles - all "outside the police zone". According to recent estimates, there are more than 150,000 people living under the old tribal laws in those dark stretches. A white traveller is an object of interest. (I saw one humorist stagger a crowd by snatching out his false teeth.) Scores, probably hundreds of natives there, have never seen a white man.

I am always happy when I can pass beyond the police zone again: It is a grand and sapacious experience, the right antidote for a long spell of city life. Past the last farm, the last police station, the last sign of government ...

Four native reserves, and much of the diamondiferous coastal Namib Desert, lie outside the police zone. When all the land within the civilized borders of South-West Africa has been allotted, farmers may be granted space in parts of the present forbidden areas. One day, no doubt, the Kaokoveld will be thrown open for settlement. The Kaokoveld has been the scene of strange dramas. You will find it marked on the map south of the Kunene River. It reaches down almost to Cape Cross, and inland for about two hundred miles.

If you decide to visit the Kaokoveld it will cost you a fine of £50, and possibly a prison sentence. No permits are issued; no one but officials and policemen may enter the territory. If you go and die of thirst as some have done then you escape the fine.

I have met a number of sergeants of that remarkable force, the South-West Africa Police (now merged in the South African Police), who have dashed into the Kaokoveld to arrest trespassers. There is a legendary treasure house of diamonds on the Kaokoveld coast that has

lured illicit expeditions by sea, land, and air again and again. So the policemen have to risk their lives, too, in cars and on camels, to keep raiders away. One true yarn, told to me at an outpost; will give an idea of the Kaokoveld.

A sergeant, just about to take his leave and get married, was ordered to drive off immediately with two constables to find and arrest a party of white men who had entered the Kaokoveld. The only police car available was small and ill equipped, but the three men set out. When the clutch burnt out they repaired it with the brake linings. When the last of their fresh water had been drunk they still followed the tracks of the diamond raiders. But at the end of three days of thirst, they could only lie beneath the car, in the only shade for miles, and wait for death.

"Our tinned food was no use to us," the sergeant recalled. "We had no appetite for bully beef, and I found that even the fig jam could not be swallowed. My companions could not talk. I decided, after a great effort, to walk on in search of help."

The sergeant tottered along and almost immediately he saw the first human beings encountered for hundreds of miles. They were beachcombing natives, an extremely low type. (Some authorities believe that the "Strandlopers", extinct in South Africa, may survive on the Kaokoveld coast.) These wild creatures led the parched policemen to an overhanging rock, and there they saw a pool of water.

"I drank so long that the natives pulled me out by the feet," declared the sergeant. "Then I tried to thank them, but although I know a little of all the chief native languages of South-West Africa, I could not make them understand me. I do not think they had seen white men before."

Refreshed, the policemen found they could eat. They filled their waterbottles and followed the trail. The tracks showed plainly that a small motorcar had piloted a heavy motortruck through and over the dunes towards the mouth of the Kunene River.

Up the slope of a great dune raced the police car. It mounted the crest, and plunged down the far

side. No brakes, remember. As the determined policemen hastily scanned the sandy wastes they saw their men right in the path of the car. The poachers were enjoying a meal. Into their midst, scattering tins and bottles, crashed the police car. Right and left jumped the diamond poachers. The car stopped at the foot of the dune and the policemen walked back to arrest the startled raiders.

The illicit motortruck carried supplies for two months. "Sacks of sugar, every possible spare part, tins of flour - a wonderful outfit," recalled the sergeant. "They came quietly. I followed them back, and got married after all."

Diamonds, as I have said, have been, and are still, responsible for long cameltreks in South-West Africa. I know the owner of a small ex-naval pinnacle who planned a raid on the coast to the north of Swakopmund. Glance at the Admiralty sailing directions for this desert shore and you will find that it is roughly, inaccurately charted, a coast which has never been thoroughly explored, almost a *terra incognita* to this day. Yet before my friend in the pinnacle left Table

Bay the exact spot where he intended to land was known to the police. (One of the crew, I learnt long afterwards, had given the information and claimed the reward.)

I believe an aeroplane was sent to the desolate spot on the surfbeaten coast, but no landing ground could be discovered. So Sergeant Thomas, two white constables and two native orderlies, set out on camels across two hundred miles of sun scorched wilderness to await the raiders. There were no roads to follow, no water-holes, no shade. They were exhausted when they sighted the blue Atlantic over the glaring dunes. Luckily for them the trek had been well timed. The pinnacle with the unsuspecting raiders arrived that afternoon, and the police in hiding watched my friend disembark a landing party.

It is not necessary in this part of the country to prove illicit possession of diamonds or even prospecting without a licence. The whole coast from the Kunene River to a point north of Swakopmund has remained "sperrgebiet", forbidden territory, since the German days. Soon

after they stepped on shore the raiders were arrested.

Arrested only in the technical sense, however, for Sergeant Thomas knew the men could not be taken back overland. The water carried on the camels might (or might not) be sufficient for the police themselves; but prisoners and police alike would perish if they all went back together. Sergeant Thomas gravely took the names of the landing party and instructed them to sail back to Walvis Bay and report there. The police started on their weary journey and the cutter put to sea. All concerned saw death at their elbows - the police just got through with parched throats and dying camels, while the raiders nearly foundered in a gale - before they all met again before the magistrate. Fines of £40 a head settled the matter.

The strange part of the affair (and many like it) is that no diamonds have ever been found at the particular spot selected for the raid. My friend the pinnacle owner admitted to me afterwards that he went on the strength of a legend and for the sake of adventure. Members

of the camel patrol have asked me earnestly to expose these diamond legends that lead to hardship, to adventure they do not seek, but never to riches.

In South-West Africa camel stories are usually grim. There was a sergeant at Rehoboth whose territory covered all the Namib Desert west of Rehoboth to the sea.

"I had to take charge of a camel party on a trek through the Namib to the coast - diamond case," recalled the sergeant. "We had with us a coloured man who had been charged with poaching diamonds and had turned King's Evidence. My job was to find out where he had discovered the diamonds, and he was supposed to point out the spot."

"Six days it took us, over the dunes, leaving sealed drums of water at different caches every day to drink on the way back. No one had expected a journey of six days, but it was literally unknown territory. Trouble was that the dunes were treacherous - we had to pull the camels over the steep sides and then urge them up the next sandy hill. We were walking in our

helmets and shirts, nothing else, instead of riding. Walking for six days. One camel died on the way, but we got through to the sea."

"Foolishly we were relying on the diamond poacher to guide us through the dunes. He stayed with us long enough to make us careless about watching him - it seemed impossible to escape in that glaring waste of sand. But he had no intention of giving his rich diamondfield away. When we woke up after the first night at the seaside the man had disappeared."

"It was a hard struggle back to Rehoboth with the camels - another six days that I don't like to think about. I had a compass, of course, and that saw us across the dunes, but it did not lead us to the water drums. We found only one. That man had been hammering and battering at it, and had failed to open it. For a long time we heard nothing of the diamond poacher - thought he must be dead. But the other day I learnt he was alive. He walked all that way without water and survived, and the police are still looking for him. I never heard of any other man who could beat

the camels at their own game, but that diamond poacher did! "

Another tale of a desperate camel ride concerns two constables, Lyons and Ackerman, on patrol in the wild, lonely country along the South-West Africa-Bechuanaland border. A pack of wild dogs attacked them. Both men fired. It would not have been difficult to beat off the dogs, but during the skirmish one of the camels bolted panic-stricken and made for a thorn tree. The old trick, of course, but Lyons knew it and jumped from the saddle. He brushed against his rifle as he fell, and there was a bullet in his thigh when he reached the ground.

Constable Ackerman, firing occasional shots to keep off the wild dogs, tore up his shirt, bandaged the wound and carried Lyons to the nearest tree. There he propped him up, put a rifle in his hands, ammunition and water beside him. It was not easy to leave the wounded man there, with the smell of blood attracting other wild creatures and the dogs still in the neighbourhood.

But Ackerman had made the right decision, and he rode off for help.

The nearest place where a doctor could be found was 120 miles from the scene of the accident. There was an outpost called Donkerbos only thirty miles away, however, and Ackerman reached it in two hours; possibly a record camel-ride for the territory. Fortunately he found Government officials there, part of a "foot-and-mouth" cordon with a motorcar. Late that night they returned to the tree where Lyons still sat, bleeding and in great pain, but alive. Twenty hours after the gun accident Lyons was carried into hospital. An older man might not have survived the ordeal. Lyons, twenty-two, went back on patrol.

Camels look streamlined and lean. In reality the loose skin covers masses of fat, and the men of South-West African outposts obtain tubs of pure soap from the humps of dead camels.

Police rations for camels in camps consist of oathay, twenty-eight lbs., per camel per day. On the veld, however, the spiky kameeldoorn tree

provides the ideal food, eked out by a diet of "twagrass" or mimosa. Nothing is too sharp for the long teeth and hard palate. The t'samma melon that saves so many lives in the Kalahari, this footballsized melon with its unpleasant rind, is swallowed almost whole by the voracious camel. Exhaustion may kill camels; hunger and thirst seldom do. They will plod on, rumbling, gurgling, belching, complaining to the last, but nearly always bringing the patrol safely to the end of the trail. Water that horses would not touch is noisily inbibed by the camel with only the usual protests. I have seen a thirsty camel take a measured eighteen gallons of water within half an hour, enough for several days. It is a fallacy, however, to suppose that water may be obtained by the drastic method of killing and opening one's camel.

The police records in South-West Africa show that camels have often covered fifty miles a day for five consecutive days without water. There was an Australian-bred camel in the southern Kalahari that carried the mails regularly over a distance of a hundred miles in half a day. I

found it difficult to discover accurate records of the longest camel run ever achieved within twenty-four hours in the territory; but General Gordon's famous ride of 143 miles in that time from Korosko to Abu Hameb must have been equalled in emergencies in South-West Africa. On such occasions the riders suffer as much as the camels. The motion of a camel at the gallop is so irritating that men never become used or even resigned to it. Constables in other lonely places love their freedom and yearn, while on leave at the seaside, to return to their beloved horses and desert splendour. The men of the camel patrol, however, need their rest; the jarring effect on the nerves is not easily shaken off. Sudanese warriors may love their camels; white policemen never do. Constant swaying affects the strongest stomach. A weary sergeant once informed me that the camel was not called "the ship of the desert" because of its usefulness as transport. It was the heavy rolling that suggested the similarity!

Witdraai, down in the southern Kalahari, is a good startingpoint for a leisurely trek on camel-

back through the vast brown spaces, broken by thorn trees, sometimes by mountains, cut across by sandchoked rivers, and bordered on the west by the enormous dunes of the Namib - the fascinating spaces of SouthWest Africa. Witdraai is a training station for police camels. Early this century, when civilization spread to these hot frontiers, the thirst and heat killed horses, and pedigree camel bulls and cows were imported from the Sudan. With them came Sudanese attendants, so that the word of command "khoosh!" was heard in southern deserts, and fresh victims learnt the tricks of the camel trade. The Germans, too, imported camels from Fuerteventura in the Canaries for their dry colony, just as they brought Kroomen from West Africa to work their surf boats at Swakopmund. Both suited the peculiar needs of the country.

A sergeant who trained camels at Witdraai once pointed out to me certain characteristics of the camel which I have never seen set out in quite the same way in the more scientific works.

"A camel is a mixture of animals," declared the sergeant. "Look at those hindquarters - it

might be a goat. The lip is split like a hare. It has the legs of a buck, the neck of a sheep, the hair of a squirrel. And the camel is the only tame beast, if you can ever call one tame, that still possesses the cunning and health and instincts of a wild creature. The eyes and nose show what living in deserts for centuries will do. You don't see any sand in the sillylooking eyes of a camel."

Training camels is one of the most arduous tasks the police service offers the unwary. It starts when a calf is about three years old; hardier at that age, though a little smaller, than the camels of Arabia and Egypt. Long before that their noses have been bored. Now the first manoeuvre is to corner the young camel and tie its feet so that the wooden peg about three inches long, forming part of the "steering gear", can be placed in the nose. The new recruit is then ready to accompany patrols on a lead and without a saddle. Thus habits of discipline are acquired, so that when the day for mounting the camel for the first time arrives, the riders hope that the results will not be violent. Meanwhile the camel carries bags of sand, and afterwards packsaddles and

provisions. This gradual breaking in is spread over a couple of years. The provisions come last because camels at this stage have a habit of vanishing into trackless desert, leaving the constable in charge to explain the loss of government property to headquarters, where the whims of camels are not always fully understood.

Nevertheless, there are always a number of semitrained camels "present and correct" when the time for saddlingup arrives. It is a sight which showmen have neglected, an unknown desert rodeo that would draw crowds in the cities. Held down by clever Hottentot servants, the camel screams and groans. The new type of saddle has the tree so constructed that there are four points of suspension, giving even weight distribution and a proper seat for the rider. Nothing touches the spine - the rider is actually supported five inches above it - and the hump is caged in to prevent injury. But in spite of all improvements, the ungrateful camel prepares to reveal its tremendous strength. The moment of release usually means a sensational moment,

both for rider and onlookers, when the camel twists and plunges in fretful abandon. Seldom does it buck cleanly and honestly like a horse. The swinging head and calculating teeth must be watched, now and throughout the camel's working life. When an unbroken camel cannot unseat the rider, a favourite device is to rush beneath the limbs of a thorn bush and sweep the man away. No human lip ever sneered more effectively than the camel's after a success of this kind.

There is a tragic side to the routine of camel training. Many lives have been lost, while there is no station that has escaped without severe casualties. At the Hofmeyr post I heard the story of a constable who found his forearm in the mouth of a vicious stud camel bull. The camel swung the man from side to side, using him as a flail, until the flesh gave way and the man, suddenly released, fell clear over the kraal wall. He had sufficient strength left to reach the mess-room and shut the door. This was fortunate, as the camel followed and would undoubtedly have killed him.

Camels, of course, must be taught to kneel. The technique in South-West Africa consists of a rope made fast to one foreleg and pulled from behind at the word of command, while a man in front taps the other foreleg with a stick. Having learnt to kneel, the obstinate camel will sometimes refuse to rise. There is a true story of a constable on a long desert patrol whose camel knelt at a waterhole and would not continue the journey. In despair the constable wheedled the camel with the last of his dates, but still the long and hairy face expressed disgust and the determination to go no further. Hunger forced the man to shoot the camel and live on the meat until help reached him.

Seldom does a member of the camel corps grow so careless that he forgets to shake out his boots and helmet every morning on the veld in search of scorpions. It is a daily duty to remember, for though the scorpion's sting does not kill a healthy man it causes more pain, and other disturbing symptoms, than some snake-bites.

Somewhere in the wilds two policemen hobbled their camels one night and started gathering wood for the campfire. One man received a scorpion sting in the hand. His companion applied the usual permanganate of potash remedy, but the poison had entered a vein and could not be checked. That night the constable sank into delirium, then rose suddenly from his blankets, seized his rifle and aimed a mad blow at his companion. This resourceful fellow remembered the handcuffs and succeeded in locking them. The fit of madness passed, but the suffering policeman was too weak to ride his camel. The other man made another painful decision - necessary in view of the limited water supply - lashed the sufferer to his camel and set off slowly to the police post. No wonder these men have so little to say about the ordinary hardships of a camel patrol.

In such a country the men of the camel corps do not boast that they always "get their man". International frontiers, hostile tribes that even the Germans left untaxed, Bushmen who become invisible when pursued - these are the odds

against them. On the hill above Windhoek stands the "Palace of Ink", the administration building the Germans built; and there I have seen rough maps and colourless official reports of great rides on camelback far beyond the zone of law and order. I know of no corner of Africa where men still lead more adventurous lives than the constables who swing and roll on gawky legs across the dusty plains, the men of the camel patrol.

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CHAPTER 17

BUSHMAN'S PARADISE

Everyone in South-West Africa has heard the legend of the "Bushman's Paradise" - that lost oasis where the children play with diamonds. No one has succeeded in rediscovering it.

One day in 1929 I flew from Cape Town with a pilot whose aeroplane had been chartered by a syndicate to search for the "Bushman's Paradise". The pilot was Capt. R. R. Bentley, who had served in the R.A.F., and later in the South African Air Force. He had made a name

for himself as a reliable taxipilot, a man who could handle all sorts of odd flying jobs. Often he carried news pictures over long distances in South Africa, and he usually arrived in time.

Dick Bentley was naturally secretive about his mission. He put me down at a lonely spot south of the Orange River, where a huge pan formed a magnificent aerodrome. Then he took off again for a place in South-West Africa where he was to pick up a member of the syndicate who would act as his observer during the search.

I had plenty of time to think over the many versions of this strange treasure story; plenty of time to wonder whether Bentley would return in triumph with the facts. One queer thing about the "Bushman's Paradise" which always appealed to me was the fact that the legend was wellknown in SouthWest Africa many years before the official discovery of diamonds in 1908. I heard a detailed narrative of one expedition which set out on this quest as far back as 1871, and there have been many since then.

The pioneer of 1871 was an Englishman, a hunter and prospector who had worked on the newlydiscovered Kimberley diamond fields. There were too many people taking part in that rush for his taste; he was anxious to strike out on his own again into the lonely places. One day a Bushman he employed as voorloper for his wagon team told him that he knew of a spot where stones similar to the Kimberley diamonds could be picked up in handfuls. The adventurous Englishman was in the mood for the long journey: He loaded his oxwagon with stores and set out towards the Orange River.

His voorloper, it seems, was a survivor of a band of Bushmen who had raided cattle along the Orange River. A Boer commando had found them and wiped them out almost to the last man. For that reason the Bushman voorloper had deserted the stronghold among the mountains where the band had lived – the "Bushman's Paradise"- and had come to work among the white people in the old Cape Colony.

The Englishman's wagon crossed the Orange River just above the lonely Aughrabies Falls, and

the expedition spent four days resting on the north bank. There were several other native servants besides the Bushman, and the leader had twenty-two oxen, a very large team, so that casualties could be replaced.

I know this lonely territory well, and I wish that I could have seen it in those days, years before the Germans colonised South-West Africa. It is still wild country, but at that time there were hippo in the Orange River and the game must have been far more abundant. Nevertheless, I can picture the English adventurer resting in the shade of the fragrant mimosa beside the water, shooting guineafowl and klipspringer for the pot, catching barbel in the stream, and watching the flamingos and monkeys on the islands.

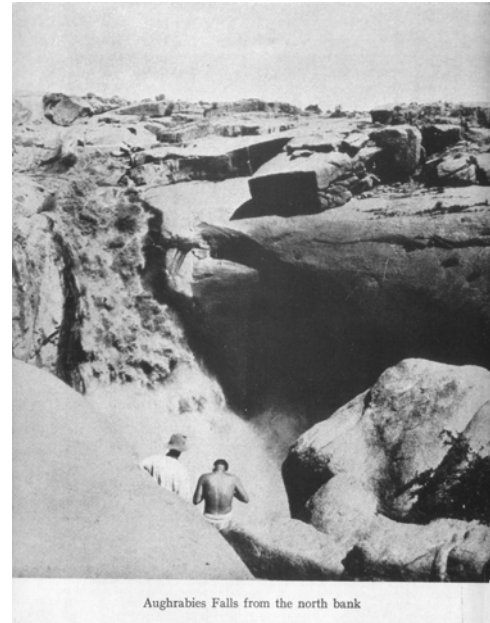
Once you leave the river banks a weary desert stretches before you. Moreover, this section of the Orange River is shut in by mountains, and only at long intervals can the traveller gain access to the river. The Englishman followed his Bushman guide into the sunbaked, waterless territory west of the Aughrabies Falls, and for

days they trekked across the hot sand. It was an ordeal for the oxen. The whole team was exhausted when the Bushman led the way at last into a narrow kloof towards the river.

They went as far as the wagon would go, then outspanned and took the feeble oxen up a game path. It was a path made long ago by elephants and rhino and all the wild animals - a path to a beautiful pool set in thick bush and fed by a spring. This must indeed have been a "Bushman's Paradise", for there all their needs would have been supplied. When a Bushman has meat and water he is content.

That night, however, the first tragedy occurred. A leopard crept up to the wagon and killed a dog; then, having tasted blood, returned and attacked one of the natives. The Bushman tackled the leopard bravely with his assegai; but by the time the Englishman came up with his rifle, the mauled servant was dead.

Next day the adventurer and the Bushman started out on foot to find the diamond deposits. They carried biltong, biscuits and waterbottles.



Aughrabies Falls from the north bank

Deep in the mountains they discovered a high thorn fence, obviously a manmade obstruction. There, to his intense surprise, the Bushman met his grandfather. It seemed that the wizened old man had escaped from the avenging commando, and had lived by himself at the "Paradise". He had kept himself alive on the normal Bushman

diet of lizards, insects, roots and wild fruit ; and occasionally he had secured a buck with his bow-and-arrow. He feared the leopards, and had made a sanctuary behind the thornbushes.

The last stage of the route to the diamonds started in a cave which soon became a tunnel through a mountain. It was hot in there, and both the Englishman and the Bushman panted in the darkness as they crawled along. The Bushman knew that there was a serious risk of encountering snakes. The Englishman wondered whether the roof of the tunnel would fall in and trap them. Only the thought of the diamonds kept him going.

Thankfully they emerged into a rocky arena with steep walls. It was like the funnel of a volcano, and the Englishman realised that there was only one way out - back through the tunnel. Under his feet was the diamondiferous gravel he had come so far to find. Within an hour he had gathered twenty fine diamonds. He had a fortune in his pocket, but his mind was uneasy. The tragedy of the leopard had depressed him; and there was the tunnel to be faced. He dreaded the

experience so much that he decided to leave immediately, with the diamonds he had collected, and get it over.

This presentiment of evil proved to be justified.. The Bushman guide was bitten by a snake on the way out. He reached the cave before his strength failed, and the Englishman rushed to the aged Bushman for help. It is a fact that the Bushmen possess snakebite and arrow poison antidotes which are still unknown to white science. On this occasion, however, the antidote was applied too late and the guide died.

By this time the Englishman had seen enough of the "Bushman's Paradise". He trekked back to civilisation and sold the diamonds. I have heard various amounts mentioned, all substantial. He then returned to England - but not before he had talked freely about his discovery.

At different times, eight expeditions have set out in search of that crater in the mountains north of the Orange. Some went by camel, others on horseback and in wagons. They searched many a remote kloof; but the Englishman had not left a

map, the Bushman guide was dead, and the "Paradise" could never be traced.

So the ninth search was being made by air, and I awaited Dick Bentley's report eagerly. When the little "Moth" landed I could see in Bentley's face that the mystery had not yet been solved. I still have my old notebook in which I recorded his story.

"When I left you I flew over a yellow and brown waste with about one farmhouse every twenty-five miles," Bentley told me. "Then I climbed over the dogtoothed mountains along the river and there were no more farmhouses. It was wicked country for flying. Those jagged mountains look blue and fascinating from a distance, but I could see no chance of making a forced landing."

"Here a blueblack mountain reared up among red peaks. There another sentinel, twisted as though a giant had played with it, seemed still to be in a plastic state. Through this welter of rock flowed the muddy river. All to the north lay a ghastly desert with dried-up watercourses marking the sand."

"I landed a long way north of the river at the place appointed, and talked to an old prospector who had been responsible for my air search. Then I realised that there was no definite clue to the 'Bushman's Paradise'. They wanted me to survey the whole, unknown area of mountains between the Aughrabies Falls and the sea."

"This was a venture which I did not feel inclined to tackle in a small, singleengined aircraft. I kept a sharp lookout for the crater and the pool on the way back, but I saw nothing but those wicked, barren mountains. You might fly for a month without seeing anything. Those diamonds are going to remain in the 'Paradise' for a long time."

Another version of the legend which has many believers is based on German military records discovered in Windhoek when South African troops invaded South-West Africa during the 1914-18 War.

It appears that a German patrol set out into the Namib Desert long before any diamonds had been discovered. One man became separated from his companions during a sandstorm; his

tracks were wiped out and he was reported as missing, believed dead. Weeks later the missing man stumbled into a military outpost and told a queer story. He said that he had been found by Bushmen and taken to an oasis among the dunes. There he had seen the Bushman children playing with diamonds.

No one accepted the soldier's story at the time. The soldier obtained his discharge, however, and set out alone on camelback to find the oasis. Not long afterwards another patrol rode in the direction the soldier had taken and found the man's body. He had been to the oasis, for this time he had mapped the route, and there were four rough diamonds in his pocket. In the man's back was one of the small, deadly arrows used by the Bushmen.

All the old Namib prospectors firmly believed in the legend. The late Fred Cornell, most famous of that band before the 1914-18 war, searched for the "Bushman's Paradise" in a small cutter, landing at various points on the desert coast and then striking inland as far as he dared go with his water supply. He had many narrow

escapes, but he met his death after a motor-accident in London. Cornell thought that the most promising route to the "Paradise" would be found by landing near Hollam's Bird Islet (about 150 miles south of Walvis Bay) and then going due east.

I met one man who claimed to have been to the "Bushman's Paradise". He was Mr. H.L. Greenfield, and in 1931 he was in charge of a diamondworking on the coast of South-West Africa. A Hottentot offered to guide him to the spot. Mr. Greenfield decided that the safest approach would be from the west, for then he could use a car to the edge of the dunes.

He carried out his plan, and rode on horseback when the car would go no further. The Hottentot led him to a valley in the dunes where there were indications of diamonds, but no sign of the legendary oasis. Mr. Greenfield was forced to retreat owing to the familiar thirst problem. He intended to equip a second expedition, but the government had decided to restrict prospecting and his permit was cancelled.

I have often heard the Bogenfels area mentioned as the scene of the "Bushman's Paradise". Bogenfels is a huge, natural limestone archway on the coast, a geological wonder; and many prospectors made rich finds close by. But the surf breaks heavily on these beaches, and many have been drowned while trying to land. Not far from the archway is the grave of a prospector who preferred a bullet to death from thirst. A mediaeval sword and other relics were found in the sand at

Bogenfels, and it is thought that a Spanish galleon was lost there. So many men have found only death in that neighbourhood that prospectors talk of the "curse of Bogenfels". One man, almost a millionaire as a result of the diamond claims he pegged there, found no happiness and afterwards shot himself.

One final scrap of evidence of the "Bushman's Paradise" came my way recently. It was offered by a wellknown South African pilot who survived the war and is still flying passenger airliners. I cannot mention his name.

Between the wars this pilot once flew direct from Windhoek to Luderitzbucht. It was in the early days of aviation in SouthWest Africa, it was an emergency flight, and the pilot chose a lonely route of which the authorities would not approve nowadays. If he had been forced down, he might never have been found.

During this flight the pilot saw an area in the Namib dunes covered with trees and vegetation - an area which was blank on his map. Airmen carry good maps, but, as I have said, he was flying over unexplored desert. He flew low to examine the oasis. Game was abundant, but of human beings there was no sign. Possibly it was the "Bushman's Paradise" that he gazed upon for a few minutes.

On the whole I think Dick Bentley was right. Too many men have perished on this quest, and one can venture too far and risk too much in search of wealth. The "Bushman's Paradise" may be found one day, but I have a feeling that the desert will claim more victims before the successful adventurers reach the oasis and the diamonds at last.

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CHAPTER 18

THE SEITZ DIAMONDS

"Oom Chris" Botha, cousin of the famous South African statesman, first put me on the track of the "Seitz" treasure legend, one of the most remarkable authentic diamond yarns ever whispered about in Africa.

Well past seventy, "Oom Chris" Botha had few grey hairs in his beard. He resembled the late General Louis Botha strongly; and though his career had been less distinguished, it had not lacked adventure. We were travelling towards a remote goldfield in South-West Africa, and sleeping on the veld at night, when "Oom Chris" asked me whether I had ever heard of the diamonds hidden by the Germans in that territory during the 1914-18 War.

"Oom Chris", of course, had not missed one of the wars of his time. When the invasion of German South-West Africa by Union troops was planned in 1914, he was granted field rank and led the way through the coastal desert. It was a country he had known ever since 1889, when he

had gone elephant hunting with the explorer Chapman. But even "Oom Chris" could not tell me the full story of the diamonds worth £500,000 that came at last, after weird wanderings, into the hands of the Union Government. It was not until I met the late Major J. G. W. Leipoldt, D.S.O., that I gathered every detail of the strange narrative.

After the surrender of South-West Africa, Major Leipoldt, chief intelligence officer of the Union General Staff, was sitting in his office at Windhoek in August 1915 engaged in a fascinating task. He had been instructed to find out whether the German military authorities had handed over all their arms and equipment: Many partially destroyed letters and documents had been collected in the abandoned offices of Windhoek, and Major Leipoldt, with the patience of the true detective, was piecing the fragments together.

One document absorbed all his attention. It had been found in the German military paymaster's wastepaper basket, and it proved to be a travelling and subsistence claim for one sergeant

and six men, forming a "diamond escort" from Luderitzbucht to Windhoek. The date was after the declaration of war. Major Leipoldt had previously suspected the presence of a large hoard of diamonds. The German Governor, Dr. Seitz, and treasury officials, had declared that the working on the Luderitzbucht coast diamond fields had ceased when war broke out; and that the whole output of about 58,000 carats had been shipped away to South America in the steamer Gertrude Woermann. Major Leipoldt, however, had reason to believe that the Germans had carried out a feverish recovery of diamonds after the declaration of war for a special purpose - as emergency cover for an issue of paper marks. He passed on his theory, but his superiors lacked imagination. "There is no possibility of any diamonds being in the country - attend to your duties and do not waste time on diamonds," came the order to Major Leipoldt.

But the Major knew that the paper currency of a defeated colonial government would not be accepted by German banks and other cautious people without security. The "Seitz notes", as

they were called, aroused his suspicion whenever he saw them. And here at last was a clue.

Major Leipoldt, ignoring the official snub, made further inquiries into diamonds. It soon became clear to him that great secrecy had been observed in collecting the "parcel", and that even the high German military officers knew nothing of the fate of the diamonds. He might, of course, have gone direct to Dr. Seitz and accused him of concealing property which should have been handed over under the peace treaty. But his hands were tied by his orders. General Smuts himself had written to him, in reply to a private note, advising him to leave diamonds alone.

Fragments of code telegrams came into Major Leipoldt's possession. They revealed that the Governor and his Finance Minister had both mentioned diamonds in messages sent to the magistrate of Luderitzbucht on the outbreak of war. The magistrate, however, would know nothing of the hoard after it had passed out of his hands.

Next in the chain of evidence came a queer and grim report from a native informer. The

intelligence department employed a number of natives to send word of people hiding or burying things. The report stated that a few nights before the surrender, convicts had dug a grave in the Grootfontein cemetery. When the work was finished, the Germans had shot the convicts. (This appears to have been correct. The German attitude towards the natives in South-West Africa never showed respect for human life.)

Grootfontein is a pleasant subtropical farming settlement in the north of the territory. Dr. Seitz and other civilian officials went there after Windhoek had been abandoned; and Major Leipoldt remembered this fact when he considered the cemetery story.

About this time Major Leipoldt was mixing with the many German civilians who had been allowed to remain in the comfortable Windhoek hotels, and he was spending his own money entertaining them in the hope of securing further clues. Very soon it will be seen that he had reason to regret this diplomatic hospitality.

Major Leipoldt decided to investigate the story of the grave. He and another officer visited

the cemetery at night with the native informer. There was no coffin in the grave; but they found signs suggesting that a small box had been buried and later removed.

Another native informer led them towards the first really important discovery. This man declared that convicts had been digging at night in an apple orchard on the Tigerquelle government experimental farm outside Grootfontein. More murders had been committed. Major Leipoldt confined himself tenaciously to the diamonds. He inspected the orchard, found a withering apple tree where the ground appeared to have been disturbed, and dug. Eight feet from the surface two boxes were exposed. Here at last was a promise of success.

The first box contained silver plate, engraved with the Hohenzollern Arms, and intended for the banquets in Windhoek arranged in honour of the visit of the Crown Prince. In the second box were the personal papers and decorations of Dr. Seitz - and something more, an inventory book. This book gave full details of the diamonds from Luderitzbucht as they were packed in Windhoek.

There was also a letter to a German sergeant, a man described as "a hardboiled Prussian non-commissioned officer with a high sense of duty and a slavish respect for nobility and his officers". As this was the man responsible for burying the diamonds and shooting the convicts, he will remain nameless.

Major Leipoldt made inquiries about the sergeant, and also about a high German official. He was informed that just after the surrender, the sergeant had trekked out to the east of Grootfontein, where the Kalahari wilderness begins. He had been accompanied by one native, and he had taken two pack mules. The sergeant had returned after three days, and it came as no surprise to Major Leipoldt to learn that the sergeant had returned alone.

The high German official was found to have made a number of suspicious journeys between Grootfontein and Windhoek. He was searched on the train, and it was proved that he had contravened the martial law regulations by carrying a number of uncensored letters. Among them were

letters from the exGovernor, Dr. Seitz, who thus became liable to prosecution.

The night after the official's arrest, Major Leipoldt was entertaining some German women at one of the hotels in an attempt to gather further information. He had to have his stomach pumped out after the party, and the medical officers diagnosed digitalis poisoning. This unpleasant interlude prevented him from taking part in certain further stages of the search, though he was in time for the finish.

By this time, of course, no one was sneering at the diamond legend. At a meeting of high Union officials it was decided that Dr. Seitz should be brought before a court of inquiry. There was one legal difficulty. The diamonds had been the property of the producing companies, and it was not known whether the German Government had commandeered them, or whether it had merely taken charge of them in the capacity of a trustee. Under the Treaty of Khorab, when the Germans surrendered, all government property had to be disclosed. It was thought that Governor Seitz might cover himself

by stating that the hidden diamonds were the property of the Regie, the diamond control organisation.

It was a delicate situation, for the Union officials were still without knowledge of where the diamonds were hidden, and they could not use the Prussian methods of the period to extract that information.

Major Leipoldt suggested making contact with the wild Bushmen of the area where the sergeant had taken the diamonds to their final hidingplace. He pointed out that the unseen Bushmen watched every white traveller in that territory; and that even if they had not witnessed the digging, they would be able to follow the sergeant's tracks to the spot.

The high official was approached with guile, and it was pointed out to him that Dr. Seitz would not care to face a charge of smuggling letters. All this unpleasantness would be avoided if the diamonds were revealed. The official gave nothing away, but he agreed to discuss the matter with Dr. Seitz.

These manoeuvres failed. A party of military officers (including Mafot Leipoldt) and civilian officials then interviewed Governor Seitz at Grootfontein to bring matters to a head.

His Excellency treated them to a memorable display of temper. (Drawing a tooth is simple in comparison with relieving a German Governor of diamonds worth half a million.) Dr. Seitz declared, in a sense truthfully, that he did not know where the diamonds had gone. He was informed that proof had been secured that the diamonds had been in his possession in Windhoek. General Berrange, the senior military officer present, ordered a search of the personal belongings of Dr. and Madame Seitz. This revealed nothing more striking than bags containing about £1,800 in gold sovereigns in one of Madame Seitz's trunks: The money was returned, but Dr. Seitz was still an angry man when the party went back empty-handed to Windhoek.

It was decided that Dr. Seitz should be brought to Windhoek, when General Beves, the Military Governor, would make a final demand.

Dr. Seitz duly appeared and, bluffing to the last, refused to hand over the diamonds.

"Well, your Excellency, you refuse, and in so doing you fail to comply with the Treaty of Khorab," pointed out General Beves. "The peace treaty is therefore now at an end, and we are going to impose a levy on the country to meet the cost of administration."

Dr. Seitz asked for time to consult his legal advisers, and the party dispersed for lunch. The Union section enjoyed their lunch, with the exception of Major Leipoldt, still suffering from the effects of digitalis. After lunch Dr. Seitz gave in. He named two Germans who were to be escorted to the hidingplace of the diamonds.

And now the tale is taken up by Lieutenant Collingwood Selby of the South African Mounted Rifles, then stationed at Grootfontein. "You are to proceed with escort consisting of two N.C.O.'s and ten men to Otjituo," his orders read. "Three Germans will travel with you and will be under your charge. You and your escort will be present while they are digging for certain articles which are supposed to be buried there.

You will not take the parcels over, but will allow the Germans to keep them. Your duties are to prevent the three Germans running away and also to prevent them being robbed."

Selby and his men trekked with the Germans for sixty miles into desert country, covering the distance on horseback, accompanied by a cart, between daybreak and five in the afternoon. The spot indicated by the Germans was a few miles from Otjituo, the last police outpost in the territory, on the way to the Okavango river. Selby suggested waiting until the next day before starting digging; but the Germans were anxious to finish their disagreeable task. So after a few hours' rest they all went to an antbear hole pointed out by one of the Germans - the only man in the party who knew the exact spot. In the moonlight Selby watched them dig out a soldier's tin kitbox. It was padlocked.

The box, with locks untouched, was taken by cart to Otjituo police camp. There the whole party spent the night, Selby and the Germans sharing one room with a guard outside the door. During the trek back to Grootfontein next day

several diamonds were found on the floor of the cart. A corner of the tin box had rusted through, and more diamonds could be seen through the crack. Selby then gave the Germans a blanket to lash round the box, and the journey ended without further incident.

Narrating his part in the affair twenty-three years afterwards, Selby seemed little moved by the drama. "It was my own camel hair blanket," he remarked, "and I never received it back."

Box and blanket went by train to Windhoek. A gathering of Union and German officials, half-eager, half-despondent, gathered to witness the formal opening of the box in the "Raadsaal" of the government buildings on the hill. It was regarded as an historic occasion.

Dr. Seitz had brought with him, as diamond expert, a Dr. E. Reuning of the Deutsche Koloniale Gessellschaft. (This was one of the geologists who, twelve years later, helped to uncover the diamond wealth of Alexander Bay at the Orange River mouth.) The rusty box was broken open. It was found that ants had entered

through the hole in the corner and carried red soil with them.

Before the burial of the box, there had been a number of separate bags, each one containing the output of a company. The white ants had eaten the canvas bags, and it was impossible to distinguish one parcel from another. One stone, however, stood out among the rough white crystals from the Namib. This was the "Ariams" diamond, a magnificent lemon-tinted specimen of forty carats, valued by Dr. Reuning at £5,000. This had been found in an inland district, and had been the property of the German Government. Altogether the stones weighed 75,000 carats. They were sent down to Cape Town and sold for £500,000 after the war. Dr. Seitz maintained to the last that he had committed no breach of the local peace treaty, as the diamonds (apart from the "Ariams" stone) were not German government property.

Some time afterwards it was learnt that Dr. Seitz was acting in accordance with a plan made soon after the "Agadir incident" in 1910. Secret instructions were sent from Berlin to Windhoek

detailing the procedure to be followed in the event of war. The diamond companies at Luderitzbucht, instead of handing their outputs over to the "Regie", were ordered to entrust them to the magistrate. This was done, as related, but German attention to detail broke down during the hurried evacuation of Windhoek, and the tell-tale evidence reached Major Leipoldt's desk. A less determined officer, discouraged and left to work in defiance of orders, would certainly have allowed this prize to slip away. When Dr. Seitz was repatriated, he would probably have carried the little tin box with him to the Fatherland as a small but valuable fragment saved from the wreckage of war.

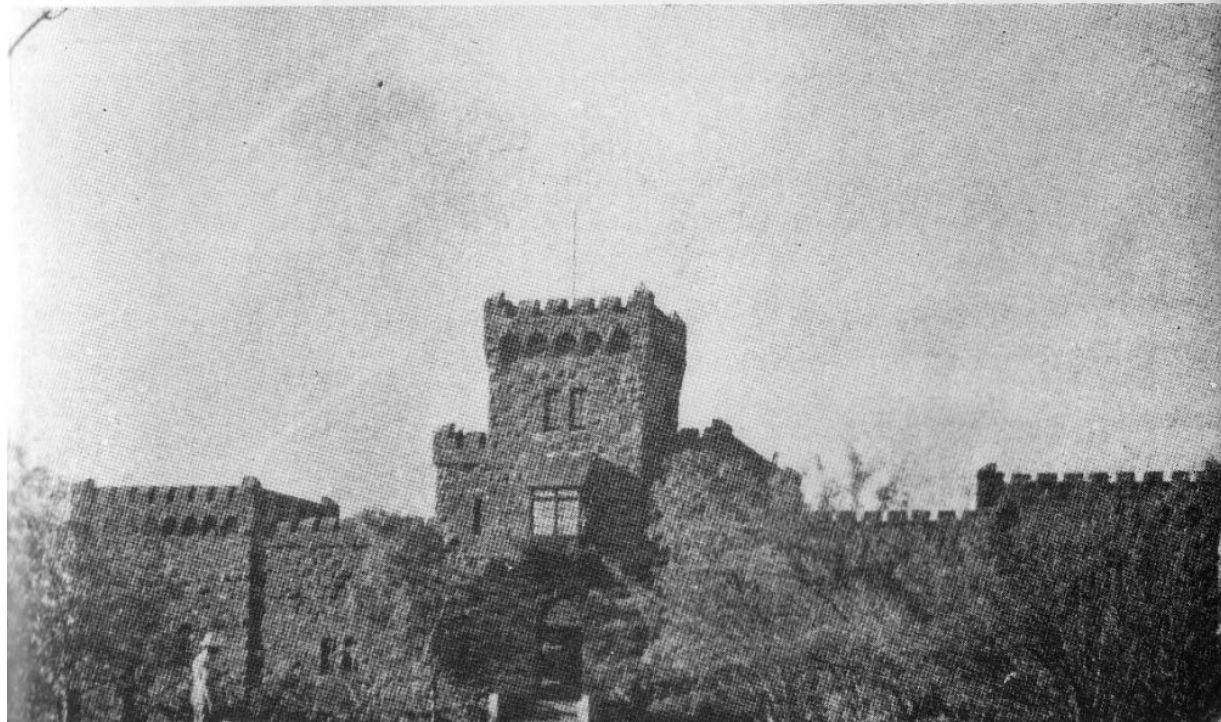
What actually happened was that the Union Government, after the sale of the diamonds, applied the former German taxation formula, taking about £250,000 and handing the other half of the proceeds back to the diamond companies.

Such a haul naturally aroused thoughts of personal rewards in the minds of several men who had taken part in the long and difficult treasure hunt. Major Leipoldt himself made no

move until he was informed that a select committee of the Union House of Assembly was to investigate the claim of a former secret agent, a German employed by the Union authorities, to a reward for services leading to the recovery of the Seitz diamonds. This naturally led Major Leipoldt to put forward a claim on his own behalf, and further claims on behalf of one assistant and the widow of another. The secret agent failed dismally in his attempt. The Leipoldt claims were dismissed mainly on the ground that the officers concerned had secured the information in the ordinary course of duty. The verdict has a familiar official ring about it, but it did nothing to soothe the memory of the digitalis poisoning. And Selby, who made no claim, had lost for ever his camelhair blanket.

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Schloss Duwisib, the luxurious castle where Baron von Wolf
and his American wife once lived far from civilisation.



CHAPTER 19

AFRICA'S STRANGEST TALE

This is Africa's strangest tale, and I am writing it in a great stone castle on the edge of the Namib Desert in SouthWest Africa. Here, within sight of the dunes, it is like the end of the known world.

The castle takes your breath away. You come upon it suddenly, by steep, rough tracks, and there it stands in a ring of hot and barren mountains. You gasp again when you enter the cool baronial hall. Schloss Duwisib, this mediaeval castle is called; but the story of the man and woman who built it and lived there belongs to this century. It has never been told before.

Baron Hansheinrich von Wolf was a German artillery officer, a drunken and eccentric member of the aristocracy. I am not presenting him as a hero. Yet there were incidents in his lurid career which count in his favour. He would certainly not have lasted long with the Nazis.

Baron von Wolf did as he pleased, and men still speak well of him in this remote district.

Yeta, his small, blonde wife, was the daughter of an American millionaire named Gaffney - a patentmedicine manufacturer who later became American Consul-General in Dresden, Saxony. There the baron met Yeta Gaffney, and there, very early this century, they were married.

Captain Baron von Wolf was sent to German South-West Africa in 1904 to take part in the merciless wars against the Hereros and Hottentots. He sailed in the Gertrud Woermann, which ran aground in fog nine miles north of Swakopmund and became a total loss. The German cruiser Vineta arrived on the scene in time, however, and the baron was rescued by his own brother, a naval officer.

Von Wolf served in the south against the Hottentots. With two fieldguns and rations for a month he was holding a lonely outpost in the wild Maltahohe district. The baron's camp servants were Hottentots, and the sight of all this food aroused treacherous instincts. One servant slipped away in the night.

Soon afterwards the small German garrison was attacked by a large force of Hottentots.

A more skilful officer than von Wolf might have driven off the enemy. But the von Wolf family had a reputation for military blundering. In the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 the baron's father had lost a whole battery. Now the baron left the Hottentots in possession of his guns and his rations. The baron and the survivors of the garrison rode for their lives and reached Maltahohe village.

I want you to remember this little incident from a forgotten war, for it is the key to the castle - the explanation of something which would otherwise remain a mystery. It has taken me fifteen years to discover all the links in the chain, but I have them now; I have given you the significant facts and later, if you have not guessed it, I will tell you everything.

Baron von Wolf was sent back to Germany in disgrace. Only his friendship with the King of Saxony, I understand, saved him from court-martial. He was allowed to resign his commission and any other man would have sunk

into obscurity. Within a few years, however, Baron von Wolf returned to South-West Africa and the scene of his defeat. His wife was with him.

They landed at Luderitzbucht and started immediately an enterprise which astounded all who heard of it. The baron bought the farm now known as Duwisib, fifty miles from Maltahohe, from the government - 56,000 hectares at the equivalent of threepence a hectare. (In other words, he secured about 130,000 acres for £700. The farm today is probably worth £50,000.) Then he hired twenty wagons from an Afrikaner transport rider named Adrian Esterhuizen. Ship after ship arrived at Luderitzbucht with building material, steel girders, antique furniture; with everything necessary to complete a castle. Italian stonemasons came too, and a Swedish carpenter. Before long a small army was at work on the farm quarrying stone and building the great Schloss Duwisib.

That was in 1907. For two years Esterhuizen toiled through the Namib with his twenty wagons, covering 200 miles on each journey

from the seaport to the farm. The baron paid him so well that he was able to buy a farm of his own in the district, and he is still living there. Towards the end of 1909 the castle was finished. The buildings had cost £25,000; and the heavy furniture, the silver, the art treasures, were worth much more.

While the castle was being built the baron and his wife lived in a hut close by. You must travel to Duwisib in summer, as I did, to understand their hardships.

I drove there in the late October heat through country suffering from the most severe drought of the century. Even the springbok were showing their ribs. Kudu, emboldened by hunger, were invading the gardens of the farmers at night. Baboons with the surly appearance of furred louts hung round the farmhouses and moved sluggishly as the car approached. Dead sheep were stacked for burning.

This is a land where kameeldoorn trees give little shade; a land where even the scorpion and the puffadder must seek protection from the sun. Duwisib is a Hottentot name meaning "the white

chalk place without water". A chalky outcrop in these parts is usually a sign of water near the surface; but the baron had to go down two hundred feet, using a handdrill, before he found the strong vein which still supplies the farm. The original windmill, bearing the name of a Dresden firm, is still working faultlessly.

During the building period the baron and his wife visited the United States to raise more money for their stupendous project. I have it from the old bookkeeper at the castle that the baron's military pension was £15 a month, while his wife's income was £15,000 a year. This was not enough. The Gaffney family supplied more funds; but they stipulated that a Roman Catholic mission was to be established at Duwisib. The baron became a Roman Catholic, built a chapel and school and installed a priest. I am sorry to have to add that the mission was not constructed in the same solid fashion as the castle. All trace of the mission has vanished, whereas the castle will stand for centuries.

Now come with me to Schloss Duwisib and reconstruct the life of the baron and the blonde

little American baroness. They have lived for a full year in their tworoomed hut, and at last they are enjoying to the full the luxuries of the castle.

At this time the baron must be about forty-four years old, his wife a little younger. There is an oilpainting of the baron in the castle - the tall, clean-shaven baron, a dark man with a determined jaw. He wears hunting pink and is mounted on his racehorse Hasso, which cost £2,000. No picture of the baroness remains, but I am assured that she is good-looking. They have no children. According to all accounts, and despite the baron's reckless habits, they are a happy couple.

The castle is a replica of the baron's ancestral home near Dresden. It measures more than a hundred feet in front, and the wings run back for one hundred and fifty feet. All the outer walls are two feet thick, with loopholes in the sides and ironbarred windows in front. There is a massive tower in the centre, over the arched entrance, and turrets at each corner.

Just inside the studded front door the baron's love of horses is shown by such rare old

coloured prints as "The Grand Leicester Fox Hunt" (Alken junior 1839) and "Northampton Grand National Steeple Chase 1840". Here, too, is a handcarved chest dated 1700 and valued at £500. Within the huge, stoneflagged hall you see old duelling pistols, swords and sabres, and an almost complete set of the famous "Spanish Riding School" engravings. Narrow stairs lead to a gallery; and from there you look down on glass chandeliers and fireplaces, chairs bearing the von Wolf crest and old tables. From there you can see, the fountain and the flowers in the courtyard, and the palm tree planted by the baron.

From there, in 1909, you would have seen the baron and baroness handing champagne to their guests. Some are German officers who have come to buy horses for the army. Others are bearded Afrikaner transport drivers, the men who helped to bring the castle into being. The administrator of the Maltahohe district is there. Baron von Wolf is a democratic nobleman, and if anyone dislikes his friends, they may leave.

Below the hall is the wine cellar, filled to the ceiling with Piesporter and Riesling, Berncastler, Liebfraumilch, Niersteiner and Zeltingen; with casks of beer and cases of Scotch whiskey.

There are seven bedrooms for the guests, all with fireplaces and brass bedsteads. Across the courtyard live the servants. The large rooms are oakpannelled, and the baron and baroness occupy a superb suite in one corner. The baronial hall, thirty feet in height, is flagged, while the other rooms have parquet floors.

Modern plumbing was installed when the castle was built. The plans have been lost, however, and the present manager tells me that he will have to dig up much ground if anything should ever go wrong with the septic tank.

One room draws me again and again. The painted ceiling must have a meaning, but it has been lost. It is the small room in the tower over the main entrance, a quaint room with an old mirror. I am told that it is a ladies' room. The painting shows a zeppelin cruising over the North Pole. Outside the brown earth simmers in the heat.

The baron is a fine pianist and a gay singer. He is in good form on this night of the housewarming. The guests wander through the long rooms in wonder. They see the "Napoleon room" with the engravings of incidents in the Napoleonic career. (No wonder the unsuccessful artillery officer was an admirer of Napoleon!) They finger the 1735 oak wardrobe with inlaid panels and try, as I did, to discover the secret keyhole. They stand respectfully before the portrait of the Crown Prince in oils, a personal gift to the baron. They admire the goldchased sword with the hilt designed as a wolf's head; with rubies as the eyes of the wolf. The blade is inscribed Horst von Metzsch s/l Hansheinrich von Wolf. Later von Metzsch is to become a member of the German General Staff. The swordmaker is Eisenhower of Dresden, a name that is to become world famous several decades later. This is the first of many entertainments at the remote castle. It is the beginning of a legend.

You can turn the clock back easily enough at Schloss Duwisib. I like most of all the ancient sideboard in the diningroom with its handcarved

grapes and old wine glasses. In this room are the portraits of the baron's father and mother. Here were once set out the silver cups awarded to the baron when his East Prussian "Trakehner" horses were successful in shows and races. He owed several trophies to his valuable Irish stallion Crackerjack, which died of old age on the farm ; and more than one to an Australian horse, born at sea between Melbourne and Cape Town, and named Neptune by the baron. There are many descendants of these horses on Duwisib, but they are running wild in the remote corners of the farm.

The best stock was always good enough for the baron. He imported camels from Egypt and Arabia, Hereford cattle, merino sheep from Australia, and in 1910 he had one of the first karakul herds in a country which has since grown rich on the black karakul wool. In the Maltahohe district they say that the baron would have made a fortune if war had not come in 1914. Certainly he spent a fortune.

He spent it on gambling and drinking parties that lasted for days. Every month he set out for

Maltahohe village in a carriage drawn by six horses, followed by a wagon loaded with bottles. I saw the chest in which he kept his drinks cool; metal lined, with places for bottles of all sizes, and compartments for ice, exquisitely designed. Maltahohe in those days was nothing more than an administrator's residence, police station, post office, stores and an hotel. It was a gruelling trek from the castle to Maltahohe, and the baron once remarked: "If I end up in Hell it will be no worse than this drive".

On arrival in Maltahohe the baron's procedure was always the same. He entered the hotel bar, pulled out his revolver and shot five bottles off the shelves. The last shot was reserved for the lamp. Then the hotel proprietor, who had been jotting down the value of each hit, presented the bill and if the details were correct the baron paid cheerfully. He would pay any amount - provided he had not been overcharged by one pfennig. That was one of his peculiarities. A good-humoured man, he lost his temper only when he was swindled, or when someone drank his beer.

All are agreed that the baron was a magnificent drinker who seldom passed out.. One night in Maltahohe, however, the baron arrived late at a dinner given by the administrator. He made his apologies, put out a hand to steady himself, and leant against a dinner wagon. The baron fell heavily amid the ruins of the main course. Unperturbed he rose and remarked: "I am sure, Your Excellency, that this was not part of tonight's entertainment."

As a gambler the baron appears to have been unlucky. The old bookkeeper assures me that he once saw a cheque for 60,000 marks (£3,000) signed by the baron after one night's play. There is a hotel manager in Windhoek today who has reason to remember the baron's weakness for cards. One night in 1914 the baron and his friends were gambling in the hotel when the police raided the place. The manager lost his licence. "I had to become a waiter again," he told me. "But I know the baron would have compensated me if the war had not broken out. He was a fine man, that baron."

The baron was elected by the settlers to represent the Maltahohe district in the legislative assembly (which was only faintly democratic) at Windhuk. Von Wolf was popular, I gather, because he never "played the baron". He was far too outspoken for the German officials, and Governor Seitz disapproved of him. The baron went his own eccentric way.

When diamonds were first discovered on the coast of SouthWest Africa the baron decided to try his luck in a new direction. With two other Germans and a few Hottentot servants he set out from Duwisib for the coast. Duwisib is more than a hundred miles from the sea. The baron covered sixty miles on camelback. Then they came to loose, shifting dunes with never an opening for the camels. They sent the camels back to the castle, tramped on to the coast and pegged claims. This was at a lonely spot called Meob, where a little brack water may be found by digging in the sand. The claims proved to be worthless, but later the baron found a few diamonds at Sylvia Hill. Then he and his companions trudged thirstily down the coast for

a hundred miles to Luderitzbucht. There the bookkeeper was waiting for him with clothes and the carriage. "The baron drank a bottle of champagne and then sat down to a game of cards which lasted all night," recalled the bookkeeper. "One would have expected him to have slept, but he was a man of tremendous stamina."

Yeta von Wolf is a shadowy figure in this narrative, for though many in the Maltahohe district remember the exploits of the baron, they have little to say about his wife. She spoke German badly, I gather, but she was a capable woman. On one occasion when the baron and his workmen were drinking beer instead of baking bricks she went to the kiln and carried on the work herself.

Once the castle had been built she was attended by a chambermaid and a needlewoman. The white staff included a chef, carpenter, farrier, horse trainer, groom, butler and the bookkeeper I have already mentioned. There were many native farm labourers, and one of them, a Hottentot shepherd, died during the

typhus outbreak only a few weeks before my visit.

All the buildings near the castle are in the mediaeval style. You can dive into a huge, round swimming bath twelve feet deep, built of the grey Duwisib stone. Under the roof of the manager's house is a blacksmith's shop with old-fashioned bellows. There is an oven for smoking meat. I also noticed, for the first time in my life, stone dogkennels and turreted pigsties. The ring where the horses were trained had its massive walls set at an angle. Vineyards and mulberry trees make a refreshing contrast with the sunbaked surroundings.

It is a self-contained world, this Schloss Duwisib, and it has need to be. Once every eleven years in South-West Africa, on an average, the dry rivers run madly, and then there is no way out. Duwisib is cut off by floods for weeks at a time.

Now it is August 1914, and Baron von Wolf and his wife are leaving Luderitzbucht in the German liner Gertrud Woermann - successor to the ship in which the baron had been wrecked

ten years before. The shrewd baron has observed the storm clouds gathering in Europe, and he does not wish to find himself suffering a second defeat in South-West Africa. He is making for Germany to rejoin the army there.

The Gertrud Woermann found sanctuary in Rio de Janeiro; but this did not suit the baron's plans. His wife booked a passage from Rio to Rotterdam in a Dutch steamer. She went on board with a huge wardrobe trunk, which was placed in her cabin. A "woman friend" was in attendance - the baron in disguise! Yeta von Wolf told the purser that her friend had left the ship. Meanwhile the baron had hidden himself in the wardrobe trunk.

During the voyage the baron never left his wife's cabin in daylight. The stewards, gossiping in the pantry, were amazed at the amount of food consumed by the petite baroness. She was always asking for sandwiches and fruit to be sent to her cabin. And not only that - she drank a bottle of whisky a day. Yet no one suspected the presence of the baron.

At Falmouth the ship was searched by British naval officers. They knocked at the door of the baron's cabin, and caught a glimpse of Yeta von Wolf in *deshabille*. This was before the days of ruthless warfare. The American lady was indignant, and the British officers retired apologising. The ship was allowed to proceed to Rotterdam and Baron von Wolf stepped triumphantly on shore. On his return to Germany the little affair with the Hottentots was overlooked, and Major Baron von Wolf was reinstated in the artillery.

In September 1915 Colonel Baron von Wolf was killed in action in Flanders. A French officer searched the body, found letters from the devoted Yeta von Wolf, and forwarded them to her, with other personal possessions of the baron, through the Red Cross.

Drunkard, spendthrift and reckless gambler though he was, I think the last dramatic episode in the life of Hansheinrich von Wolf was admirable.

When the baron left Duwisib in 1914 he placed his friend Count Max von Lutichau (still

living in South-West Africa) in charge. Soon after the war ended the estate was declared bankrupt, and it was sold with all its treasures for £7,050.

The new owners were a wealthy Swedish couple, the Murmanns. When their son grew up he learnt to fly, and the Murmanns had their own aircraft parked on a large pan near the castle. It is sad to have to record that Mr. Murmann died suddenly at Duwisib and his son, a South African Air Force pilot, was killed in action in this war. The cattle and the farm were sold again, this time to a company for £25,000.

Baron von Wolf's widow married again between the wars, and I am told that her second husband was a Munich banker named Schlemmer. It is believed in the Maltahohe district that she is still alive - some say in Germany, others declare that she returned to the United States.

Schloss Duwisib lost some of its treasures during the 1914-15 campaign, including a £10,000 Persian carpet. The baroness put in a claim for the old silver after the war, but not a

spoon could be found. Fortunately the furniture was too heavy to move, and those who looted the carpets and silver did not appreciate the value of the pictures. It stands to the credit of the company which now owns Duwisib that the castle is being maintained very much as it was in the days of the baron.

From the window of the diningroom at Schloss Duwisib you can see a distant mountain peak called Wolfsberg. The baron has left his name on the map.

So now I am going to sleep in the stone castle where von Wolf revelled with his friends. There are no secret passages here, and no ghosts, but there is this mystery.

Why did von Wolf return with his wife to the scene of his disgrace? He might have lived far more luxuriously in the pleasant city of Dresden; and there is no doubt that he was a man who knew how to enjoy all the amenities of civilisation. Instead, as I have shown, he settled for years at the end of the world, in a wilderness of duststorms and burning summer heat. This

was no life for a woman, yet the woman found all the money for this fantastic enterprise and shared the years of exile with her husband.

In his younger days Baron von Wolf was a guest at country seats in England. Many in America must remember Yeta Gaffney. But there are very few still living who know the whole story of Duwisib.

Why did they build this castle?

If you ask the Maltahohe farmers who knew him they will reply: "Oh, his wife had plenty of money". That is no answer at all, and the riddle would gnaw at my brain tonight if an old friend of Baron von Wolf had not told me the answer years ago. I am happy because I know. You, too, have all the clues and I need add only a few details.

Yeta Gaffney, before her marriage, had been an early follower of the psychologist Sigmund Freud. When her husband returned to her from the Hottentot war she realised that he was a broken man. He had lost his army career, his state of mind was desperate. She studied him

with sympathy and rare understanding, and at last the idea came.

"We must go back to the scene of your defeat," she told him. "Only there will you realise what a small thing this is in a whole lifetime. We'll face the people there together ... build a castle and live in grand style so that they will be proud to accept our hospitality. A castle in the desert, Hansheinrich von Wolf..."

And so the grey Schloss Duwisib still stands in a far corner of the Maltahohe district, strange monument to a devoted woman's inspiration.

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